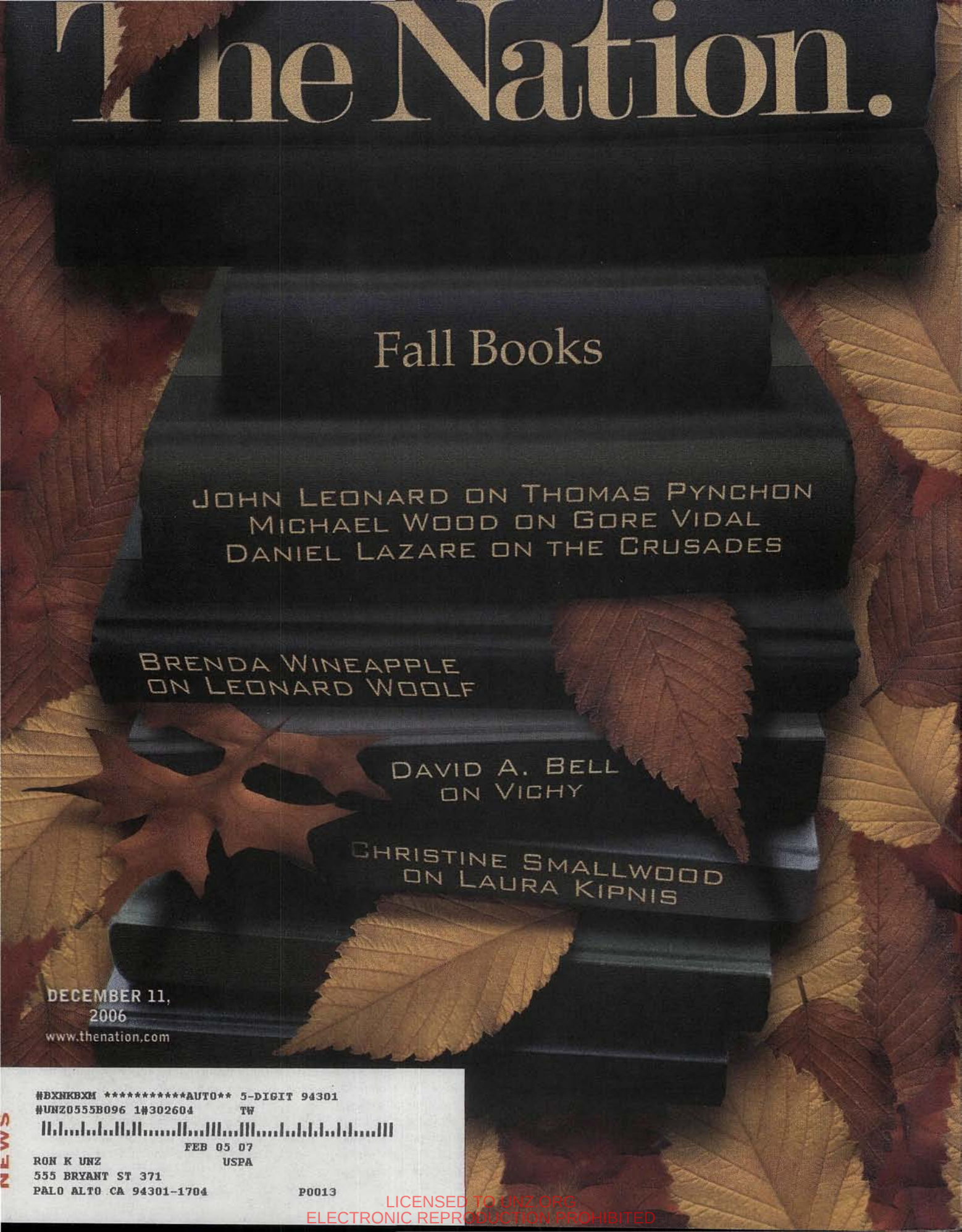

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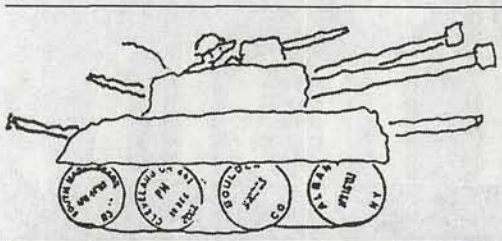

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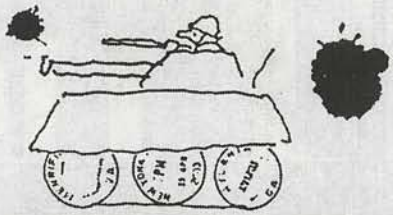

R.O. BLECHMAN

Awesome Powers

Hidden Valley Lake, Calif.

■ I am so grateful to William Deresiewicz for enabling me to see how deluded I have been ["Science Fiction," Oct. 9]. I'm tempted, even, to sue Richard Powers for the roughly 250 to 300 hours of my life I have spent reading his deeply flawed novels. Strange to say, I have actually experienced—obviously due to my "sentimentalism"—rather profound emotions in novel after novel. I was always puzzled that such an intellectually rich author could stimulate sobs from what I believed to be the depth of my soul. Clearly Powers is a charlatan, if we are to accept Dr. Deresiewicz's insightful critique. Coveting a MacArthur "genius" award myself, I rush to agree that these folks, too, must be deluded.

For instance, Dr. D says of *The Echo Maker*, "It won't tell you much about what its laboriously accumulated information and elaborately constructed concepts have to do with what it means to be alive at a particular time and place, or what it feels like." Simple me! Sentimental me! One of my inappropriate breakdowns occurred while reading of the meeting of Delia David and David Strom at the Marian Anderson concert in *The Time of Our Singing*. I sob even as I write, remembering what I imagined to be the glory of Powers's writing.

The DAR had canceled the black diva's concert at their hall, so Eleanor Roosevelt opened the Mall and hundreds of thousands came. Delia and David, black and Jew, man and woman, singer and listener, joined their souls. She feared the racial chasm, wanted to walk away. A black child seeking his lost brother seals them into a pledge and a marriage to a world without racism. I guess I must be a real sucker!

Or perhaps Dr. D is the sucker, the attacker, the Yale prof who gets his kicks from dissing the authors he can't approach? He seems to have a bad habit, one a skillful neuroscientist or author of immensely creative fiction might diagnose. A quick Internet scan finds references to his "hatchet job on Terry Eagleton" in *The Nation*; a *New York Times Book Review* of his characterized as "among the most savage dismissals not only of one book but of an author's entire oeuvre (with a few stabs at the author himself thrown in for good measure).... Usually it is only spiteful ex-lovers who get this nasty"; and Dr. D's opinion in the *Times* that Susan Sontag has "never before...made such large claims for her moral pre-eminence, her exemplary fulfillment of the intellectual's mission as society's conscience. In effect, she's the first person in a long while to nominate herself so publicly for sainthood." ERNEST LOWE

Raleigh, NC

■ "Perpetually trying to prove something," "ethically coercive and intellectually pedantic," "pious and self-righteous," Richard Powers's fiction, proclaims William Deresiewicz—with pious self-righteousness—serves "neither the cause of art nor of justice." What sins has Powers committed? His characters are flat, his novels lack organic unity and his fiction is didactic.

If Deresiewicz's understanding of *The Time of Our Singing* is any indication, however, Powers needs to be *more* didactic. Deresiewicz seriously misreads this novel. He says its conclusion about race is that since they won't be accepted by whites, "black people should stick to their own culture and their own kind." In truth, the novel views race from an evolutionary perspective as "only real if you freeze time, if you invent a zero point for your tribe.... Race is a dependent variable. A path, a moving process."

That Deresiewicz should misread this novel is no surprise, given his distaste for Powers's use of science, his "laboriously accumulated information" and "textbookery." Deresiewicz says Powers is not an experimental novelist but then dismisses the most experimental element of his fiction, the integration of rigorous scientific knowledge into the literary novel. His real objection seems to be that he has been forced to page through long scientific discourses. Thus he suggests Powers has written too many novels, calculates their average length and reminds us that one novel is more than 600 pages! Complaints about Powers's ambition and productivity and engagement with science sound odd coming from a Yale professor who is working on an intellectually weighty and politically urgent tome on the "cultural history of modern friendship."

In assessing Powers's fiction, *Nation* readers should ask themselves which they think more worthwhile: "locating meaning in experience" and "letting the story speak" or seeing "the human species as but another evanescent episode in life's vast flow" and passionately conveying the "magnificence of nature, the obligation to live humbly and responsibly." JIM NEILSON

Columbus, Ohio

■ Richard Powers is a great writer, not because he is smart (he is), not because his books are filled with ideas from a wide range of fields (they are) but because he writes great books—great, moving books that are indeed filled with "what it means to be alive at a particular time and place, or what it feels like." That's why so many readers read them, not because society is bemused by "science" or because critics tell them to. In each book, Powers connects what's going on—or has gone on—in the world with what is happening today to individual people, often by intertwining two seemingly separate stories that prove to be interrelated. This includes the great *Gold Bug Variations*, which Deresiewicz undervalues. Deresiewicz might as well have titled his review "Hey, Powers: Showing Off Your Smarts Doesn't Make You a Great Writer." His take on the few other novels by Powers he mentions does not make me credit what he has to say about Powers's latest work. PENNY MATTERN

DERESIEWICZ REPLIES

New Haven, Conn.

■ I'm not surprised at the strength and volume of protest elicited by my criticism of Powers's work. Powers is both prodigiously gifted and highly acclaimed—two things I was at pains to point out in my review—and he clearly has many fans, many of whom are undoubtedly thoughtful and sensitive readers. Reasonable people will disagree over a novelist's merits, and the vitality of those disagreements is a measure of a culture's health. Less healthy is when disagreement becomes the occasion, as it does in these letters, for misrepresentation and personal attack.

In citing the number and average length of Powers's novels, I was quite clearly seeking to give him his due as a remarkably prolific writer, not, as Jim Neilson claims, complaining about his ambition and productivity. I was also very clear about how impressive I find those "long scientific discourses"—but only as scientific discourses. (I grew up in a scientific household and was a science major in college; I find science neither alien nor dull.) Neilson praises Powers's "integration of rigorous scientific knowledge into the literary novel," but the whole problem is that Powers doesn't integrate it. His latest novel may preach a view of "the human species as but another evanescent episode in life's vast flow" and remind us of the "magnificence of nature, the obligation to live humbly and responsibly" (phrases that come from my review, of course), but however attractive those ideas (and I find both very attractive), they have almost no connection to the novel's story. This is what I mean when I say that Powers fails to locate meaning in experience or tell us what it feels like to be alive, with the result that his expression of these ideas, however rhetorically forceful, has no emotional force. As for *The Time of Our Singing*, its racial pieties—a fair sample of which Neilson quotes—aren't simply unrelated to its story but actually at odds with it. Powers tells us

(Continued on Page 52)

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IN THIS ISSUE

EXCHANGE

2 AWESOME POWERS
Ernest Lowe, Jim Neilson, Penny Mattern, William Deresiewicz

EDITORIALS & COMMENT

3 THE ODD ATTACK ON DEAN

4 TAKING LIBERTIES
An Immodest Proposal
David Cole

5 GREEN TIMES
Big Win for Enviros
Mark Hertsgaard

6 FRIEDMAN'S CRUEL LEGACY
William Greider

8 PROP 209: TEN LONG YEARS
Carmina Ocampo

COLUMNS

6 DEADLINE POET
On When We Can Leave Iraq
Calvin Trillin

9 THE LIBERAL MEDIA
Liar. "Liar?"
Eric Alterman

10 BENEATH THE RADAR
Their Opportunism, Our Opportunity
Gary Younge

BOOKS & THE ARTS

11 PYNCHON: Against the Day
John Leonard

16 VIDAL: Point to Point Navigation: A Memoir, 1964 to 2006
Michael Wood

21 DAHL: Collected Stories
Stephen Amidon

24 KIPNIS: The Female Thing: Dirt, Sex, Envy, Vulnerability
Christine Smallwood

28 VINEN: The Unfree French: Life Under the Occupation
CALLIL: Bad Faith: A Forgotten History of Family, Fatherland, and Vichy France
David A. Bell

36 Secrets (*poem*)
Eavan Boland

38 SUSSMAN, ED.: Decca: The Letters of Jessica Mitford
Charles Taylor

42 GOPNIK: Through the Children's Gate: A Home in New York
Suzy Hansen

44 TYERMAN: God's War: A New History of the Crusades
Daniel Lazare

49 GLENDINNING: Leonard Woolf
Brenda Wineapple

Cover by Gene Case and Stephen Kling/Avenging Angels; illustrations by R.O. Blechman and Adrian Bellesguard

EDITORIALS

The Odd Attack on Dean

Amid Democratic postelection celebrating, there was a bizarre outburst: a malicious attack launched by James Carville against Howard Dean, chair of the Democratic National Committee, demanding his ouster. Carville's freakish initiative was bogus in every way. He has the same influence in party affairs as any other talking head on CNN—that is, none. In a year when the Democrats achieved their first real Congressional victory since 1992, Carville accused Dean of losing seats by not devoting more money to close House races.

The Ragin' Cajun was promptly stuffed. Don Fowler, former state party chair of South Carolina, observed: "Asking Dean to step down now, after last week, is equivalent to asking Eisenhower to resign after the Normandy invasion." Senator Harry Reid, the new majority leader, rallied to Dean too. "I didn't support his running for the chair of the DNC," Reid said. "I was wrong. He was right: I support his grassroots Democratic Party–building."

Carville's reckless foray, joined by pollster Stanley Greenberg, is worthy of comment only because the two are picking a fight that reflects the deep, potentially explosive fault-line in the party: the battle for control between old and new. Carville speaks for yesterday's failed politics—the Clinton years. Dean represents a more promising future with his aggressive efforts to rebuild a fifty-state party that grows from the grassroots up.

On the day after the election, Clintonistas-in-Waiting awoke to realize their wing of the party is not represented at the top of the party. For them, it seems, restoration of a Clinton White House—getting Senator Hillary Clinton nominated in 2008—needs inside influence. Harry Reid and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, despite their cultural differences, are both labor liberals. So why not take a shot at Dean and see what happens? Senator Clinton issued a limp disavowal, but if her side wants to start a fight, she can't have it both ways.

To get the hypocrisy, remember that Carville and Greenberg came to fame with Bill Clinton's 1992 "Putting People First" victory. The new President promptly turned right, and his White House eviscerated the DNC's promising coordination of state party campaigns. Clinton politics was all about *him*. Eight years later, Democrats had lost it all: White House, Senate, House.

In contrast, Dean got a lot of flak when he remarked that Democrats should start talking to everyone, including people in deeply red states. He made the same pitch when he ran for DNC chair in 2005 against the establishment and won.

Surprise—Dean has actually done what he promised. He gets funds to states, with the result that Democrats are speaking directly again to people in red areas, including through ads on Christian-right radio. This is politics for the long term. Nobody expects early conversion in Mississippi. But less than two years after Dean's launch, Democrats won control of the House and Senate for the first time since the Clinton team lost it in 1994.

The party does face a soul-searching reckoning, and this is a good fight to have. But it should not be determined by the typical push-and-shove of Beltway insiders arguing over tactics. The argument has to be more fundamental: Are Democrats ready to take on the big concerns they have so often finessed in this conservative era? Will they respond to the anger and discontents expressed by people in this election, or will they continue to play it safe?

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An Immodest Proposal

LIBERTIES

Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff made an impassioned plea to the Federalist Society the other day for "judicial modesty." Modesty is of course a virtue, but Chertoff failed to say why he had singled out judges for this particular lesson in manners. What about executive modesty? The Bush Administration has in recent weeks done everything it could to coerce the courts into a "modest" position, so that they will not interfere with the Administration's own immodest arrogations of power.

What Chertoff actually meant by modesty turned out to have little to do with Emily Post. He was peeved that some have suggested that international law is a relevant guide to how the United States should conduct itself. He complained bitterly of the European Union's objections, predicated on international law, to handing the United States personal details on every airline passenger traveling to the United States. But he also singled out for criticism human rights lawyers, in particular University College of London professor Philippe Sands, author of *Lawless World*, a trenchant critique of the damage our country has done to international law in the "war on terror." Sands's sin was to have suggested that international law might over time develop rules that are binding on countries like the United States. The notion that the United States might actually be accountable to any authority other than itself, Chertoff complained, is simply undemocratic—despite the fact that we have long insisted that other democratic nations abide by international law obligations.

Chertoff omitted reference to the most recent culprit in the effort to hold the United States accountable to international law—the Supreme Court. Its June decision in *Hamdan v. Rumsfeld* held that George W. Bush's military commissions violated the Geneva Conventions. But that's of little concern, apparently, because the Administration successfully employed the democratic process (read, a Republican-controlled majority in Congress) to enact a statute that overrode the Supreme Court's decision and barred the courts, including the Supreme Court, from even considering the Geneva Conventions in any lawsuit against the United States.

The Administration has already invoked the Military Commissions Act (MCA) to argue that the many cases that have sought to hold it accountable for its treatment of "enemy combatants" must be dismissed, and the courts will soon rule on whether this enforced modesty is unconstitutional for, among other things, denying detainees judicial review of their treatment while confined. The Administration has aggressively invoked the MCA, arguing that it applies not only to those held at Guantánamo but to any foreign national detained in the "war on terror," including Ali Saleh al-Marri, a student from Qatar arrested far from any battlefield, in his home in Illinois, and held as an enemy combatant.

The Administration has also invoked the MCA in an attempt to deny lawyers access to people recently transferred to Guantánamo from the CIA's "black sites." The Center for Constitutional Rights filed suit on behalf of one such detainee, Majid Khan, but the Administration has argued that CCR's lawyers cannot even meet with Khan. First, it claims that the MCA bars judicial review

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COMMENT

of Khan's detention. Second, and more troubling, it contends that even lawyers with security clearance cannot meet with Khan because by virtue of having been held in a secret prison, he may disclose top-secret information, specifically including the techniques of interrogation used against him.

Talk about modesty. This argument maintains that the United States can "disappear" suspects into secret prisons, a violation of basic human rights; hold them there incommunicado for years without charges, another human rights violation; interrogate them using "alternative techniques" that have reportedly included waterboarding and that almost certainly rise to the level of torture, a third human rights violation; and then label its own abuses "top secret" to preclude the victims from talking to a lawyer.

Finally, during the same Federalist Society conference that Chertoff addressed, Vice President Cheney, never accused of being overly humble, lashed out at a federal district court in Michigan for having had the temerity to rule the Administration's warrantless wiretapping program illegal. According to the Vice President, the legality of the National Security Agency's wiretapping program "is a matter entirely outside the competence of the judiciary." Cheney never attempted to explain why the case, which involves straightforward interpretation of statutes and the Constitution—the kind of work courts do every day—was beyond judicial competence. Apparently no explanation was necessary.

Arguments like these suggest that Chertoff's call was misdirected. It is the executive branch, not the judiciary or the international legal community, that needs to rein itself in. Despite the Supreme Court's rejection, three times, of executive claims of unilateral, uncheckable Commander in Chief authority—and despite having become a pariah in the eyes of the world for its refusal to be bound by the laws of war at Guantánamo, its defiance of the UN Security Council in invading Iraq, and its failure to demand accountability for systemic abuse at Abu Ghraib and the CIA black sites—the Administration continues to act as if the problem lies with everyone else. This is an Administration that truly ought to be modest, and if it can't be, we need the courts, actively, to hold the line. DAVID COLE

David Cole (cole@law.georgetown.edu) is The Nation*'s legal affairs correspondent.*

Big Win for Enviros

There's no question that America's environmentalists won big in the midterm elections. "We picked up twenty new environmental votes in the House of Representatives and five in the Senate, plus four governorships," says Carl Pope, executive director of the Sierra Club, who called 2006 "the most successful midterm election in the environmental movement's history."

Whether the victory is big enough to change government policy during the last two years of the Bush presidency, especially on the overriding threat of global warming, is less clear. Much will depend on how worried Republicans get about running on Bush's environmental record in 2008. "Congressional Republicans will adopt an 'avoid embarrassing Bush' strategy," predicts Brent Blackwelder, president of Friends of the Earth. Now that Democrats enjoy majorities in both houses of Congress, Blackwelder adds, "they could get a decent global warming bill through the House and probably onto the Senate floor. If Republicans conclude they can't defeat the bill on a straight vote, they'll filibuster it to save Bush, and ultimately themselves, the embarrassment of vetoing it."

With a narrow 51-to-49 Senate majority, Democrats lack the votes to block filibusters, much less override vetoes. But moving strong legislation and daring Republicans to take the heat for scuttling it would enable Democrats to position themselves as the party of environmental protection and energy independence, two themes that increasingly resonate with voters across the political spectrum, analysts say, pointing to the Senate victories of organic farmer Jon Tester in Montana, Claire McCaskill in Missouri and Sherrod Brown in Ohio, all of whom spoke often about linking green energy development and economic revival.

But this scenario is plausible only if Democrats act in unison and are willing to take bold positions—no small assumptions. The temptation will be to embrace incremental measures that can attract bipartisan support rather than legislation strong enough to match the problems. Future House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate majority leader Harry Reid boast strong environmental records, as do Barbara Boxer, the new chair of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, and Nick Rahall, chair of the House Resources Committee. But many rank-and-file Democrats have been quiet during Bush's six years of trashing environmental protections. And John Dingell, the veteran Detroit Congressman who regains the chair of the powerful House Energy and Commerce Committee, has long been Congress's most adamant opponent of increased fuel-efficiency standards for cars and trucks—a key element in any meaningful global warming policy.

Nevertheless, "going from a Congressional leadership that marched in lockstep with Bush to one led by Pelosi and Reid will mean that debates no longer start with proposals that would take us backward," says Anna Aurilio, legislative director of USPIRG. "We won't have to keep fighting to protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refugee; ANWR is safe now. Instead, we'll have an opportunity to bring forward policies that could actually solve the problems we face."

And lawmakers of both parties may now think twice before voting against the environment, considering what else happened in these elections. The Sierra Club, the League of Conservation Voters and other green groups targeted a bipartisan "Dirty Dozen" members of Congress for defeat: nine were brought down, including the man pilloried as Public Enemy Number 1: Representative Richard Pombo, the California Republican who led the charge to drill in ANWR and gut the Endangered Species Act.

"The defeat of Pombo sends a clear message to anyone who might share his ideology: When it comes to elections, the environment is now a giant killer," says Pope. Pombo had won past elections with more than 60 percent of the vote, and Pope recalls that "nobody—not the Democratic Party, not pundits, not even some of our own people—thought we could beat him." But envi-

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COMMENT

ronmental groups sent an army of volunteers to Pombo's district, made 643,000 phone or face-to-face contacts with voters and poured in $1.2 million to help elect—sweet irony—a wind energy specialist named Jerry McNerny. "The unsung hero" of the victory was former Congressman Pete McCloskey, says Pope, adding that, although McCloskey lost against Pombo in the primary, he awakened Republicans to Pombo's flaws and opened them to making a different choice in November [see Hertsgaard, "A Dragon Slayer Returns," March 27].

Pelosi promises that in the first 100 days Democrats will rescind $12 billion in tax cuts for oil and gas companies and invest it in renewable energy. But the energy that Democrats seem to have in mind is corn-based (rather than sugar- or cellulose-based) ethanol, which is as environmentally dubious as it is popular with Farm Belt politicians and the agribusiness giants who pocket the subsidies. The news is better on global warming. Boxer says she will introduce legislation modeled on the law that California recently passed requiring state greenhouse gas emissions to decline to 1990 levels by 2020. Pelosi, along with 109 others, has endorsed similar legislation, sponsored by Representative Henry Waxman of California, that includes a target of 80 percent reductions by 2050, which scientists urge to avert the worst of global warming.

If Democrats can pass either of these initiatives, they could signal to businesses, individuals and the rest of the world that a change is coming to US global warming policy. Congressional Republicans would then face a choice: Do they stick with the do-nothing policies of a lame-duck President or try to reposition themselves in the run-up to 2008? Calculations on both sides of the aisle will be influenced by the wild card of public opinion. The last year has brought a reawakening of popular and elite concern about the environment in general and global warming in particular, aided by the media attention Al Gore's movie generated. The challenge for environmentalists—allied with a growing green business constituency—is to fan that mood into a sustained bonfire that convinces incumbents they must take real action or risk retirement in 2008. In that case, the next two years might bring some surprises from Washington after all. MARK HERTSGAARD

Mark Hertsgaard, The Nation's environment correspondent, is a senior fellow at The Nation Institute.

CALVIN TRILLIN

On When We Can Leave Iraq

Conditions on the ground, Bush says, will show
When we can leave; they must be less adverse.
Which means we should have pulled out long ago,
Since these conditions go from bad to worse.

Friedman's Cruel Legacy

Now that the economists and their camp followers have mourned and celebrated the life of Milton Friedman, allow me to kick a little dirt on the icon. Without question, Friedman was the most influential economist of the second half of the twentieth century, as his admirers claim. What they do not say is that he was also the most destructive public intellectual of our time.

Friedman actually failed as a scientific economist but succeeded as a moral philosopher. His greatest scholarly accomplishment—his monetarist theory of how to regulate money and credit—was intellectually flawed at its core and collapsed when the Federal Reserve tried to follow it. The central bank wisely discarded Friedman's money-supply approach before it did more damage. It is now a forgotten relic at the Fed.

Friedman's broader argument—that a society should be governed by self-regulating markets instead of big government—did better but also did not lead to the utopia he promoted. His "free market" faith has produced instead the very thing Friedman regularly denounced: a bastardized system of interest-group politics that serves favored sectors of citizens at the expense of many others. Enterprise and markets were indeed set "free" of government regulation, but big government did not go away (it grew bigger). Only now government acts mainly as patron and protector for the largest, most powerful interests—the same ones that demanded their liberation. Instead of serving the broad general welfare, government enables capital and corporations to feed off the taxpayers' money and convert public assets into private profit centers, shielded from the wrath of any citizens trying to object. If that is what Friedman really had in mind, he should have said so.

His most profound damage, however, was as a moral philosopher. He championed an ethic of unrelenting, unapologetic self-interest that effectively pushed aside human sympathy. In fact, humans' responsibility to one another has been delegitimized—portrayed as an obstacle to the hardheaded analysis that maximizes returns. Friedman explained: "So the question is, do corporate executives, provided they stay within the law, have responsibilities in their business activities other than to make as much money for their stockholders as possible? And my answer to that is, no, they do not."

Pay no attention to the collateral consequences. Your only obligation is to the bottom line. Friedman's message was highly appealing—he promised people a path to freedom—but it triumphed, ultimately, because it served the powerful forces of capital over labor, economic wealth over social concerns. Government was indeed failing on many fronts, especially inflation, and liberalism had no answer. Friedman's answer was alluringly simple. Get rid of government.

People everywhere now understand what Friedman's kind of "freedom" means. America has been brutally coarsened by his success at popularizing this dictum—millions of innocents injured, mutual trust gravely weakened, society demoralized by the hardening terms of life. Most people know in their gut this is wrong but see no easy way to resist it. Friedman's utopia is also drenched in personal corruption. The proliferating scandals in

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business, finance and government flow directly from his teaching people to go for it and disregard moral qualms. When you tell people in power that their highest purpose in life is to maximize their own returns, there is no limit to how much "good" they will do for the rest of us. I don't recall hearing Friedman express any discomfort. Perhaps he regarded looting and stealing as natural features of capitalism that market forces would eventually correct.

This is what the memorials left out: the cruel quality of Friedman's obliviousness. Art Hilgart, a retired industrial economist, recalls hearing Friedman lecture in 1991 and recommend the destruction of Medicare, welfare, the postal system, Social Security and public education. The audience was dumbfounded.

Finally, a brave young woman asked what this would mean for poverty. "There is no poverty in America," Friedman instructed. A clear voice arose from the back of hall: "Bullshit!" The audience cheered wildly. WILLIAM GREIDER

Prop 209: Ten Long Years

November marks the tenth anniversary of the passage of Proposition 209—the 1996 California voter initiative that eliminated consideration of race and gender in contracting, hiring and admissions practices. The anniversary is a bitter one for activists concerned about equal opportunity. "Prop 209 took away one of the few effective tools we as a society had to counter race-based exclusion. We're paying for it now," says Julie Su, litigation director of the Asian Pacific American Legal Center (APALC) in Los Angeles.

Jarring statistics about UCLA's freshman class this year testify to Prop 209's devastating impact on diversity in higher education. Only 100 African-Americans enrolled—2 percent of the 4,802 total and twenty-five fewer than last year. Twenty of those 100 were recruited athletes. This year's number is the lowest in more than thirty years—particularly troubling considering that the percentage of African-American applicants who meet minimum requirements to be considered eligible for admission to the University of California system has risen steadily in the past decade. "That is the strongest evidence of an anti–civil rights and anti–equal opportunity measure," says the Rev. Jesse Jackson.

The crisis at UCLA has sparked an angry outcry from alumni, community leaders and students. In May the African Student Union organized a walkout of about 300 students, who left their classes and marched to the chancellor's office to demand that something be done. According to Karume James, 21, a recent UCLA graduate, their message was simple: "Why are there no black people here?" In June the Alliance for Equal Opportunity in Education, a coalition of organizations including the NAACP, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Urban League and the UCLA Black Alumni Association, demanded an overhaul of the admissions process, alleging that UCLA's flawed practices had harmed black enrollment as much as Prop 209.

Such efforts resulted in some significant changes. In July the UC Regents voted to conduct a study of the ten-year effects of Prop 209, and two months later UCLA announced that it would move toward adopting a more holistic review of applications, similar to that used at UC Berkeley, where an applicant's entire file is considered within the context of educational circumstances, opportunities and challenges. Many activists view UCLA's move as a step in the right direction but feel that holistic review alone is not enough to counter race-based exclusion. (According to Su, Berkeley adopted holistic review only after African-American, Filipino and Latino high school students, represented by civil rights groups including APALC, filed a lawsuit in 1999 alleging that its admissions process was discriminatory. Holistic review has not made a significant difference at Berkeley, where only 3.3 percent of this fall's freshmen are African-Americans.)

Many community activists strongly believe that Prop 209 should be repealed. Reverend Jackson says, "Of course there's a need for a repeal. We need to revive a commitment to equal access and equal opportunity and the dream of a one-big-tent America—one big tent and no one in the margins." Representative Diane Watson of Los Angeles, an advocate of greater access to education, notes that there have been some state efforts in the past ten years to increase diversity regardless of the passage of Prop 209, but since education is under state authority, California voters would have to pass an initiative in order to repeal the proposition. Watson says, "I am shocked and ashamed that we still have a prohibition against the use of affirmative action in terms of admission to the University of California. We fought it tooth and nail in 1996, and I would like to see it repealed—and we will be doing everything we can to repeal it."

No concrete moves to roll back Prop 209 have as yet been taken, however. Most energy right now is directed toward gathering data and toward fighting conservative attempts to extend its scope. A coalition led by Bay Area organizations called Impact 209 has been polling Californians about their attitudes toward Prop 209; so far, their research has shown that most voters did not know what they were voting for ten years ago and are unaware of its effects in the years since.

Students and community activists agree that the ideal of "color blindness" that has come to dominate the way race is discussed (or not) in this country has presented the most difficult challenge to raising awareness about Prop 209's regressive effects on diversity. Eva Paterson, president of the Equal Justice Society and an African-American Berkeley Law School alum, believes there's a dire need to get the issue of race back on the table. "Color blindness is an absurd concept," she says. "The only way I can live in a color-blind society is if I have a bag over my head."

CARMINA OCAMPO

Carmina Ocampo, a summer 2004 Nation *intern, is a student at UCLA School of Law.*

ON THE WEB: Max Blumenthal mixes it up with right-wing culture warriors at a conservative film festival. Katrina vanden Heuvel tells the story behind the walkout at Smithfield Packing Company—a victory for union organizers and immigrant workers. John Hope Franklin says there may be something great about winning a war, but America must learn it's greater to use peacemaking tools to build a better world.

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Liar. 'Liar?'

Once upon a time, only people with bad manners took note of the fact that George W. Bush was an inveterate liar. One such person, pundit Michael Kinsley, observed back in April 2002, "Bush II administration lies are often so laughably obvious that you wonder why they bother." Back then it was undeniable but all but unsayable in the mainstream media. Even when addressing himself to the very topic of Bush's myriad lies six months later, *Washington Post* scribe Dana Milbank combed his thesaurus and came up with "embroidering," "taken some flights of fancy," "taken some liberties," "omitted qualifiers," etc. But even this artful linguistic circumlocution so infuriated Karl Rove & Co. that the White House pressured the *Post* to reassign the reporter. When asked to comment on an incontrovertible, unarguable, prime-time presidential lie—Bush publicly claimed that Iraq would not allow inspections, when in fact the UN inspectors had to be kicked out for his war to begin—on CNN's *Reliable Sources* program, Milbank said, "I think what people basically decided was this is just the President being the President." What, after all, is the big deal about lying about why you started a war?

Bush had been lying right from the start, of course, but just for fun, one assumes, he recently decided to double-down on his bet. On the day after the election, Bush explained to the media that the discrepancy between his insistence just a few days earlier to reporters that Donald Rumsfeld would stay in his job come hell or high water while, in fact, he had already started the process to replace Rumsfeld with Robert Gates could be explained by... well, heck, Bush just felt like lying about it. His exact words: "I didn't want to inject a major decision about this war in the final days of a campaign. And so the only way to answer that question, and to get you on to another question, was to give you that answer."

Bush's bald admission proved a breathtaking break with presidential precedent. After all, presidential lying is nothing new, but on virtually every occasion I studied for my book on the topic, *When Presidents Lie: A History of Official Deception and Its Consequences*, presidential lies were said to rest, somehow, on national security needs. (The obvious exception was Bill Clinton's blowjob lie, which he attributed—compellingly in my view—to his constitutional right to privacy under the Fourth Amendment.)

Given Rumsfeld's portfolio, Bush could easily have gone the "national security" route. The lefty blogosphere would have grumbled, as would a few liberal pundits, but the news pages and the Sunday shows would have swallowed hard and moved on. And on cable and talk-radio, Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity and Bill O'Reilly would have used words like "traitor" and "pro-terrorist" for anyone who didn't. (Presumably, the old Andrew Sullivan would have called for jailing the current one.)

But because Bush couldn't be bothered to pretend this time, he created a conundrum for much of the media. The press claims all kinds of special privileges for itself—legal, financial and ethical—based almost exclusively on its constitutionally protected role as the watchdog of the rulers for the ruled. Democratic theory requires that citizens choose their leaders on the basis of true information about their preferences and performances, and the very raison d'être of the political press is to provide it. But if those leaders are free to lie—and the press plays along with those lies—then democracy itself is undermined. How many members of Bush's base, one wonders, roused themselves to run to the polls on November 7 because, well, "say what you will about Bush, at least he promised to stick by that Rumsfeld fellow." A day later their democratic decisions would seem a cruel joke.

What's more, now that Bush has come out and all but said, "I lie because I feel like it," nothing he says can be taken on faith. Some will no doubt resist this. Having been deprived of the "It's not a lie if the liar believes his own lie" argument that had previously proven so popular, *This Week*'s George Will excused Bush on the grounds of his apparent imbecility. "The English language is not always the President's friend," Will explained, as if Bush had been reared speaking Sanskrit. But this dog is not likely to remain in the media's hunting party for long. Bush's revealed contempt—both for the truth and for the reporters whose job it is to find it—has created a kind of existential crisis for reporters and their bosses: "If the President is willing to call himself a liar, how can we go on pretending it isn't so?" And yet, if they remain unfree to call the President a liar, well... you get the point.

So far, nobody in the MSM really has a handle on the issue. The *Washington Post*, to its credit, ran five separate news stories that touched on the lie—two online and three in the paper. (This was originally misreported in the liberal blogosphere, which charged the paper with changing the wording of its stories to protect the President from his lie. In fact, the *Post* merely printed multiple stories with differing descriptions of the lie, with no subsequent changes in any of them.) All were reasonably straightforward, deploying phrases like "appeared to mislead," which is as close as the paper's editors can bring themselves to calling a lie a lie. Unfortunately, the only story devoted exclusively to the lie itself was by Howard Kurtz, who could think only to ask if Bush's lie about Rumsfeld was "on par with President Bill Clinton's hair-splitting defense in the Monica S. Lewinsky investigation that 'it all depends on what the definition of is is.'" The *New York Times* barely touched on the question—treating the decision to replace Rumsfeld as a typical Washington soap opera. Save for the occasional op-ed, the issue soon disappeared under an avalanche of stories about Nasty Nancy Pelosi (the new Wicked Witch of the West in Morton Kondracke's phrasing) and "maverick" John McCain, the MSM's President-in-Waiting. We were back to business as usual in George Bush's America. ■

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GARY YOUNGE

Their Opportunism, Our Opportunity

The Republicans had yet to concede Virginia and there were around a dozen House races still too close to call when *New York* magazine hit the stands the week of the midterm elections. It featured a picture of Hillary Clinton and the words: "And now the real race begins."

Elsewhere CNN had already designed a banner for the bottom of the screen that read "America Votes 2008." *The Economist* ran a cartoon of Clinton and John McCain on horseback with the headline: "And they're off! The real election campaign gets under way."

November's elections, which saw both houses of Congress switch sides, were, it appears, at best symbolic and at worst meaningless. For a substantial vote with real results we must wait two years—2008, it seems, is the new 2006.

The indecent haste with which the punditocracy shifted its attention from the elections that were not yet over to the elections that have not yet begun was instructive. It is not difficult to see why some might disregard the midterms. The President has the power to start wars, withdraw troops and veto legislation. Look at the amount of damage Bush has done this past six years and how little the House and Senate have done to stop him, and you would be forgiven for thinking Congress exists not to further democracy but simply to administer its orderly demise.

Moreover, 60 percent of the people did not vote. Thanks to gerrymandering, roughly 10 percent of the House seats were truly in contention; 8 percent were not contested at all. So in the vast majority of races, that people voted at all owed more to ritual than to any hope of effecting change.

These are all reasons for Americans to ignore elections altogether, not to follow each campaign obsessively only to move on to the next one without stopping to understand what just happened. But given the manner in which the political class views elections—in terms of polls, personalities, cash and coverage—such a seamless transition is not only inevitable but entirely logical.

Elections are big business. This year the parties spent $2 billion on ads alone. Throw the thousands of lobbyists, consultants and fundraisers into the mix, and the electoral-industrial complex starts to develop a momentum of its own. Clinton, who faced only token opposition in a Senate race she won by thirty points, still spent $27,000 on valet parking and $13,000 on flowers.

The mainstream media are complicit in all this. The permanent campaign allows them to transform politics into a never-ending soap opera—a staple diet to feed twenty-four-hour cable news programs and keep the Congressional press corps focused on the race rather than what change might come beyond the finish line.

For the actual issues raised by the midterms seem to have no bearing on whom the pundits have chosen as the favored candidates in two years' time. According to a Pew Research survey, the most important issue affecting people's votes this November was the war in Iraq. Yet the people most often touted to run in 2008 are Hillary Clinton, who voted for the war, John McCain, who backed the war and wants to send more troops, and Barack Obama, who opposed the war as a candidate but does not support setting a timetable for troop withdrawal now that he's in the Senate.

To despair at the absence of decent candidates who could advance a coherent liberal/left agenda at this stage is to miss the point. Presidential politics is not designed to support progressive candidates; indeed, it is set up to exclude them. Monied interests are too prevalent, and the media gatekeepers are too conservative, for good things to happen on purpose. In short, the gulf between what constitutes political "common sense" and "good sense" is too great to be bridged by one election or one person.

Nonetheless, there is sufficient democratic space for us to play a role in shaping the political narrative—regardless of who the protagonists are. For those who do run are feathers for every wind that blows. And it is anybody's guess what storms will rage eighteen months from now.

Sensing an outpouring of patriotism in the run-up to the war, Democrats seeking the presidency voted for it. Seeing Ned Lamont defeat Joseph Lieberman in the Connecticut primary in August and the public mood calling for troops to be brought home, they spoke against it. Back in 2002, with war imminent and Bush still popular, nobody predicted the rise of Howard Dean or the impact he would have on the Democratic primaries. Neither Dean nor Lamont won. But the point is, a year before they ran neither was supposed to have a chance—and both definitely had an effect. The fact that they were able to mount a challenge owes to forces outside the Democratic Party.

Three key things have boosted the Democrats' electoral fortunes since the beginning of the Iraq War, and none of them have had much to do with the Democrats. The most important was the strength of the Iraqi resistance. According to experts on foreign policy and public opinion, the key determinant of whether or not Americans support a war is not the morality underpinning the intervention but whether they think they will win. If the war had been the "cakewalk" the Administration promised, Dennis Hastert would still be Speaker of the House. The second, to a lesser but nonetheless significant extent, has been the antiwar movement, which maintained a crucial presence even if it never fully gained electoral expression. And finally, there is Bush's incompetence, which fertilized the soil for the first two.

In all likelihood the factors that will shape the next presidential election do not yet exist, and if they do we have yet to become sufficiently aware of their importance. Either way, our task as progressives is not to follow the candidates but to create the movements that will bring influence to bear on whoever decides to run. We must see their opportunism as our opportunity. If we build it, they will come. ■

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FALL BOOKS

ADRIAN BELLEGUARD

Close Encounters of the Fourth Kind

JOHN LEONARD

AGAINST THE DAY.
By Thomas Pynchon.
Penguin Press. 1,085 pp. $35.

What were they doing out here this late in history? —*Thomas Pynchon*
Against the Day

From, roughly, the World's Fair in Chicago in 1893 to, roughly, the silent movies and the Palmer Raids of the early postwar 1920s, nobody in this novel is ever home. Instead—flyboys and magicians, anarchists and Pinkertons, alchemists and pilgrims, mathematicians and spies, fugitives, refugees, nomads, bandits, ghosts—they are on the road and on the lam. Or up in a hot-air balloon, looking down on volcanoes and the Paris Commune. Or burrowing underground like a Frank Herbert sandworm, in search of Shambhala, the earthly paradise of Tibetan Buddhism, or Aztlan, the mythical home of the original Mexicans. And no matter how hard they run in Outer Europe, Inner Asia, Deep Germany or the wild American West, something sinister keeps gaining on them—"polar darkness," "ancient purpose," "mad disorder," "ruin and sorrow," "the stripped and dismal metonymies of the dead" and/or a fourth dimension.

"Gravity pulls along the third dimension, up to down," says one of the many mad scientists we meet in these feverish pages; "time pulls along the fourth, birth to death."

We hear a lot about the fourth dimension in *Against the Day*, as well as double refraction, bilocation, perfect mirrors, imaginary numbers and lateral world-sets. We hear equally about US labor history, including Haymarket, Homestead, Coeur d'Alene, Cripple Creek, Ludlow and Mother Jones; and the Mexican Un-Revolution, that strut-and-fret of Diaz, Madero, Huerta, Carranza, Obregón, Villa and Zapata; and ethnic seething in the Balkans, before Rebecca West, Marshal Tito or

John Leonard, a Nation *contributing editor, writes on books every month for* Harper's *and on television every week for* New York *magazine.*

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Richard Holbrooke got a chance to do their fiddles; and turn-of-the-century parapsychology, with its mountain-misted tommyknockers and dreamworld Tenochtitlans. But because *Against the Day* is a full-blown and full-fledged Pynchon novel—and thus not only an occasion of joy in every nook of American culture except *The New Republic* but also a phantasmagoria whose only conceivable analogue is another Pynchon novel, *Gravity's Rainbow*—we hear almost as much about mayonnaise, Futurism, landmines, poison gas and the ancient Albanian honor code of Kanuni Lekë Dukagjinit.

"Inspect your shoes, Mrs. Kindred, it's gettin deep around here."

As usual, there are dozens of characters with silly names (Mia Culpepper, an astrologist, is my favorite, but Pleiade Lafrisee's hard to beat). And dozens of words we have to look up (absquatulated, fulgurescence, xanthocroid, cataplexy). And geography-drops to shame Bruce Chatwin (Tsangpo-Brahmaputra, Domodossola). And snacks to sate velociraptors (brain tacos, Meat Olaf). And, though nothing is quite as addictive as a blood vendetta, enough mind-altering substances to kill the White Rabbit (opium beer, cactus peyote, chloral hydrate, cigarettes soaked in absinthe, "cocainized brain tonics" and somewhere on the Silk Road between Turfan and Novosibirsk a flowering hemp twelve feet tall and fungomaniacs who drink each other's urine). Plus a speaking in tongues that ranges, according to its narrative needs and whimsies, from *Gulliver's Travels* and *The Book of Urizen* to *The Labyrinth of Solitude* and *The Tin Drum*; from Herman Melville to Nathanael West to John Dos Passos to Joseph Heller to Carlos Castaneda, by way of extreme Kerouac; from Mark Twain, Jules Verne, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Dashiell Hammett to S.J. Perelman, P.G. Wodehouse, Umberto Eco and Monty Python; from such boys' adventure books as *Tom Swift in the Caves of Ice* to such '40s radio serials as *Mr. Keen, Tracer of Lost Persons* to such '40s flicks as *Casablanca* and *The Third Man*. (And yet, and yet—always the jaunty, cheeky, demotic, katzenjammer Tom, joshing us through what Don DeLillo calls the "whispers and apparitions at the edge of modern awareness," as if Huck Finn surfed a Mississippi wave of dread.)

As in *Rainbow* and *Vineland*, vampire capitalism and the Western death wish are alive and kicking. As in *Mason & Dixon*, the earth is hollow and a geometry of violence "more permissive than Euclid" wrings profit from oppression. As always, a Bodine appears, here an American stoker on an Austrian battleship. If entropy and the second law of thermodynamics aren't mentioned until a thousand pages in, we feel their shadow presence and tidal pull from the first mention of electromagnetism. (Anyhow, this time around, Newton's third law of motion is more important.) The biggest surprise, not counting the space devoted to Lake Baikal, white slavery, Tamerlane's tomb and Jonah and the whale, is an astonishing excess of ukuleles. I mean, they show up more often than doggerel and puns. There is even a ukulele version of Chopin's Nocturne in E minor.

"It isn't only the difficult terrain," says a Kashgar prophet to an American student about the Chinese desert; "the vipers and sandstorms and raiding parties. The journey itself is a kind of conscious being, a living deity who does not wish to engage with the foolish or the weak, and hence will try to dissuade you. It insists on the furthest degree of respect." He might be talking about this grand, unruly novel in which, by a sort of reverse ghostliness, the future will "trespass" on the past: Indiana Tom Beyond the Speed of Light.

Within the mirror, within the scalar term, within the daylit and obvious and taken-for-granted has always lain, as if in wait, the dark itinerary, the corrupted pilgrim's guide, the nameless Station before the first, in the lightless uncreated, where salvation does not yet exist.

—*Thomas Pynchon,* Against the Day

*

"Your mother's a Pinkerton!"

—*Thomas Pynchon,* Against the Day

It's a *Perils of Pauline* plot as pulpy and fibrous, as gnarly and pantophagic, as a thicket of bamboo. Everything ends up polarized, because we are working our way through ideas of light as thickening as they are wavy; and everybody ends up paired, as if for Noah's Ark. Meanwhile, under these covers, in what may be a narrative riff on William Rowan Hamilton's quaternion-based algebra of vector and tensor spaces, four different stories compete for our attention:

1. *The Chums of Chance.* These are the balloon boys, the Tom Swifts, Frank Merriwells and Dink Stovers in the gondola of the hydrogen ship Inconvenience, "ascensionaries" into the blue yonder and characters in their own series of adventure books, pure of heart and brave of bone, with their "dual citizenship in the realms of the quotidian and the ghostly" and their loyal skydog, Pugnax.

Ordered about by authorities they never see, the balloon boys spy from above on World's Fair riffraff, looking for bomb-throwers; monitor the man-made lightning experiments of Nikola Tesla in Colorado in 1900 from a volcano in the Indian Ocean; witness the disinterring from Arctic ice of a sacred, serpent-figured odalisque, an incendiary "consciousness" that burns down a city much like New York; scour the "ancient sepia" of Venice in search of "the fabled Sfinciuno Itinerary, a map or chart of post-Polo routes into Asia, believed by many to lead to the hidden city of Shambhala itself"; confound their shadowy enemies by disguising themselves as a harmonica band at Candlebrow University in Iowa, among "Russian nihilists with peculiar notions about the laws of history and reversible processes, Indian swamis concerned with the effect of time travel on the laws of Karma, [and] Sicilians with equal apprehensions for the principle of vendetta"; float their gassy boat all the way to Bukhara, where it turns out the people in charge are more interested in oil than in Shambhala; and somehow sense, in the sky above Flanders, on the road from Ypres, a tearing open of Time's fabric, and themselves "swept through, with no way back, orphans and exiles" who find they will do what they must, "however shameful, to get from end to end of each corroded day."

Although the Charter of the Chums of Chance, like the Federation's Prime Directive to the starship Enterprise, prohibits interference with the legal customs of any locality they touch down upon, of course they step in it. Think of them as America, meaning well with a boyish grin. It is the business of history and Pynchon to debauch their innocence. That such Peter Pans wind up pairing off with Tinkerbells—a Sodality of Aetheronauts "like a flock of February chaffinch," with metallic wings, machined feathers, black kidskin and nickel plating—is a Neverland of dime-novel wishful thinking.

2. *Mathematicians, Magicians and Parapsychologists.* These children of Hamilton, Tesla, Houdini and Blavatsky are all over the novel's world, from Cleveland, Colorado, Iowa and Yale to London, Iceland, Göttingen and Sarajevo. "Water falls, electricity flows—one flow becomes another, and thence into light," whose "revealed mysteries" drive mathematicians as mad as the Venetian mirror-makers. ("I want to know light," says one; "I want to reach inside light and find its heart, touch its soul, take some in my hands.") They imagine a map, somewhere in Riemann space-time, in which a linear axis becomes curvilinear, linear time thus becomes circular and eternal return is achieved. In the same way, the parapsychologists of T.W.I.T. (True Worshippers of the Ineffable Tetractys) seek in Orphic and Pythagorean mysticism, in

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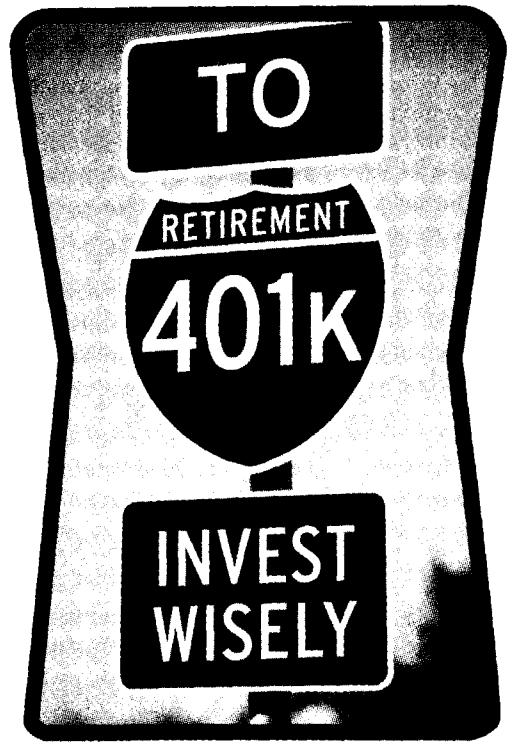

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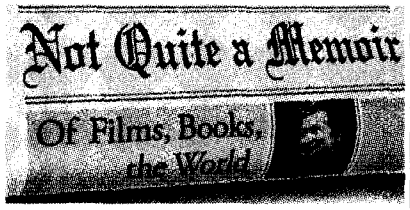
Judy Stone
in



WRITERS

Laureate Orhan Pamuk: "My friends used to criticize me for not being political enough... (when) fascists and communists were killing each other in the streets, I stayed home and wrote books. I always felt guilty because my friends were putting themselves in danger."

Laureate Czeslaw Milosz: "Perhaps the day will come when science will be more open to poetry. But we are... in a world of separation, of division, of fragmentation. You know Humpty Dumpty on the wall? Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. How to put those pieces together again?"

And: E. L. Doctorow, Amos Oz, Meyer Levin, Maya Angelou, Jean Genet, Isabel Allende, Manuel Puig, Conor Cruise O'Brien, Azar Nafisi, Doris Lessing...

FILMMAKERS

Paul Newman: "An amazing collection of characters. I wish I were one of them."

Amos Gitai, Hany Abu-Assad, Im Kwon Taek, Hirokazu Kore-Eda, Liev Schreiber, Jeremy Irons, Gus Van Sant, Zacharias Kunuk, Alexander Payne, Satyajit Ray, Julie Taymor, Alejandro González Iñárritu, Todd Field...

Abbas Kiarostami, Iranian Palme d'Or winner, in an e-mail to the author: "...what a wide range of personalities... to grasp someone's persona in a single article is no easy task and you did it in the best possible way."

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Judy Stone is also the author of "Eye on the World: Conversations with International Filmmakers" and "The Mystery of B. Traven."

Tarot cards, magic crystals and nut cutlets, a Golden Dawn of telekinesis and "a gateway to the Ulterior." Whereas magicians like Luca Zombini, with his "perfect mirrors" and Nicol prisms, wish merely to trick us into a disappearing cabinet.

Where Quaternion meets Tetractys and Zombini is at the nexus of Iceland spar, a doubly refracting crystal that multiplies images so exactly as to unleash twinship and "the mysterious shamanic power known as bilocation" on an already schizzy situation. For mathematicians, magicians and mystagogues alike, not to mention double agents in all the information ministries, this refraction is a portal into an icy elsewhere—"pulses of color, dense sheets and billows and colonnades of light and current, in transfiguration unceasing"; "induced paramorphism," "ever-more-polycrystalline luminosities of meaning" and a "doubling of Creation." But also, much less cheerfully—"*sinister unknowability*," "unholy radiance," "nocturnal ghostways," "axes of sorrow and loss" and "a lethal impedance in the air, as if something malevolent were making every exertion to take form and be released upon the world in long, dry, cracking percussions, as if jarring the fabric of four-space itself."

I will not pretend to grasp all this. In a Richard Powers novel, I am almost persuaded that I could crack the genetic code myself, given his elegant instructions. In a Pynchon, I just go with the metaphoric flow, which turns out to be a long way. At least none of it is contradicted by the latest string theories, with their "extra" dimensions and "supersymmetry." It is suggested here that such fraught light, converted maybe into lasers, was somehow responsible for the Tunguska Event in Siberia in June 1908, where an explosion in the nuclear range, equivalent to ten to twenty megatons of TNT, felled 60 million trees over 830 square miles. Instead of comets, asteroids, earthquakes or ball lightning, why not Chernobyl—"the destroying star known as Wormwood in the book of Revelation," after which, for a while, reindeer flew, clocks ran backward and wolves walked into churches to quote Scripture. But "we of the futurity" are not required to take this suggestion seriously. We know what really happened when atomic physicists went into the Los Alamos desert, took light in their hands and broke it like a pencil. And a lot of good it did us to quote Sanskrit.

3. *Anarchists and Those Who Love Them.* Instead of up in the air or abstractions, they are down in caves, tunneling for railroads, mining metals. Our hero here is Webb Traverse, who, as a hoistman, singlejacker and even assistant foreman in the Colorado silver mines, "never saw a minute that didn't belong to somebody else"; whose membership card in the Western Federation of Miners reads, as if auditioning for a part in the nostalgia craze, "Labor produces all the wealth. Wealth belongs to the producer thereof"; whose clandestine identity is the Kieselguhr Kid, a dynamiter of anything owned by those "Plutonic powers" who "daily sent their legions of gnomes underground to hollow out as much of that broken domain as they could before the overburden collapsed, often as not on top of their heads"; who is murdered by thugs in the employ of the railroad tycoon Scarsdale Vibe; who must be avenged by his three sons, who are likewise stalked by assassins—Reef, a gambling man who leaves the country when the heat turns up, to tunnel in the Alps; Kit, a mathematician who goes first to Yale, then Göttingen and finally Tibet; and Frank, who spends most of this book fighting on the losing side in the Mexican Revolution.

As *Vineland* reminded us of a lost history of radical politics on the West Coast; of union organizing in mines, logging camps and canneries; of strikes against San Joaquin cotton, Ventura beets and Venice lettuce; of Tom Mooney, Harry Bridges and the '50s blacklists, so *Against the Day* gives us a remarkable sense of a working-class culture with "a shared dream of what a city might at its best prove to be," under permanent siege; of stockmen, gunsmiths, drovers, barkeeps, remittance men and pharmacy drummers "with giant sample valises full of nerve tonics and mange pills"; meatpacking scars, needlework squints, drift, squat, fatigue, foreclosure, unemployment and dispossession; scabs, militias, vigilantes, the National Guard and the Ku Klux Klan; bullpens and bayonets, Bakunin and Kropotkin, Joe Hill and Viva Zapata.

All that needs to be said of Yashmeen Halfcourt, girl mathematician; Wren Provenance, girl anthropologist; Dahlia Rideout, girl stage personality; and Ruperta Chirpingdon-Groin, girl trampoline, is that women get in the way of vengeance. Already, from *Gravity's Rainbow*, you should know about Pynchon and kinky sex. What happens here belongs more to the sociology of Weimar Republic fetish clubs than to the political science of class war.

4. *Bad Guys.* They are capitalists, Pinkertons, diplomats and double agents. "Smite early and often," says Scarsdale Vibe. Since they have hollowed out the earth with their technologies of desire, we root for a hard fall and reciprocal sucking. But they almost always get away with it, so why give them

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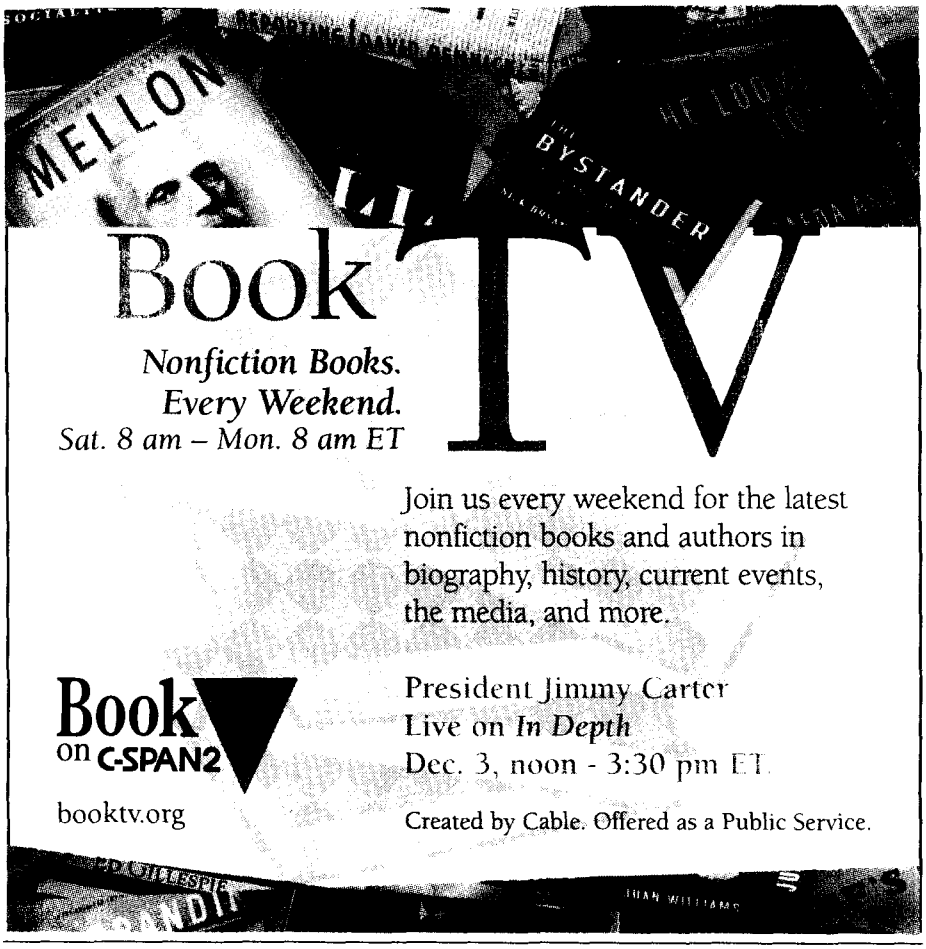
any more time of day? Instead, I hold out a forlorn hope for the Tatzelwurm we meet in the tunnels between Switzerland and Italy, a snake with paws, a serpent of resentment, a "primordial plasm of hate and punishment at the center of the Earth." If Reef, Kit and Frank fail to avenge their father, maybe the Tatzelwurm will.

But as if, too, there might exist a place of refuge, up in the fresh air, out over the sea, someplace all the Anarchists could escape to, now with the danger so overwhelming, a place readily found even on cheap maps of the World, some group of green volcanic islands, each with its own dialect, too far from the sea-lanes to be of use as a coaling station, lacking nitrate sources, fuel deposits, desirable ores either precious or practical, and so left forever immune to the bad luck and worse judgment infesting the politics of the Continents—a place promised them, not by God, which'd be asking too much of the average Anarchist, but by certain hidden geometries of History, which must include, somewhere, at least at a single point, a safe conjugate to all the spill of accursed meridians, passing daily, desolate, one upon the next.

—*Thomas Pynchon,* Against the Day

Pynchon actually imagines an Anarchist spa, Yz-Les-Bains, a Big Rock Candy Mountain for resting-up Wobblies, hidden in the foothills of the Pyrenees. To which he adds sprinkles—an Anarchist golf game, like croquet with flamingos in *Alice in Wonderland*, like the Mad Hatter's high tea. Another mirror heard from.

I mentioned Newton's third law of motion, which assures us that for every force acting on a body, the body exerts a force of equal magnitude in the opposite direction along the same line as the original. It would be comforting to think that something so straightforward applied as well to human behavior; that we could count on a balancing of the ethical books at the end of every bloody day; that there was some sort of entropic jurisprudence, according to which a pissed-off moral universe insisted on recovering its equilibrium; that the return of the repressed is a sure thing. On the one hand, as Ruperta explains to her London friends: "I can never claim forgiveness from anyone. Somehow, I alone, for every single wrong act in my life, must find a right one to balance it. I may not have that much time left." On the other, the Red Reverend Moss Gatlin can't be clearer: "If you are not devoting every breath of every day waking and sleeping to destroying those who slaughter the innocent as easy as signing a check, then how innocent are you willing to call yourself? It must be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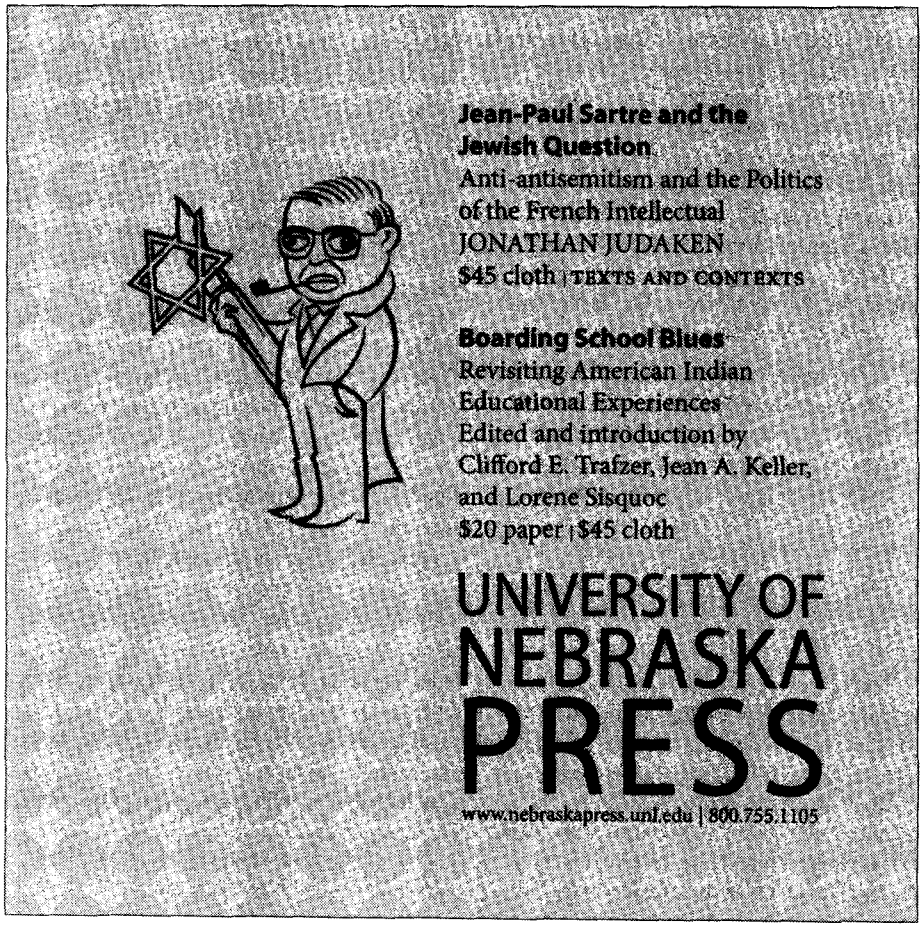
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negotiated with the day, from those absolute terms." Pynchon himself suggests that somewhere below ground, or buried at either pole, or waiting in ambush on the other side of a portal, a membrane or a looking glass, invisible forces mass to motion like an angry Wormwood, for payback time. In his Mexico, the gringos can't sleep at night in their grand villas for fear of the bolero and fandango to come.

There were tunnels, channels, sewers, trollfolk and a polar redoubt in *V* as well. In *The Crying of Lot 49* there was Tristero, a subterranean signal system for the dispossessed in "a separate, silent, unsuspected world" of squatters "living in the very copper rigging and secular miracle of communication." Underground in *Gravity's Rainbow* there was Dora, the prison camp and Mittelkwerke city of rockets and salt; and "the invisible kingdom" of crematoria ghosts on the other side of Pökler's vacuums; and the Schwarzkommandos who believed that the unappeased souls of their dead were waiting in the Arctic. In *Vineland*, besides Thanatoids and Indian spirits, there were the dolphinlike woge who hid beneath the ocean to see what we did with their world. In *Mason & Dixon*, to avenge the shadow-land shapes of the shamefully martyred and nameless dead against such puppet masters as the Royal Society and the British East India Company, there were dream-bodies, ghost-fish, black dogs, werewolves and Gnostic remnants. Remember the "luminous Phantoms" Mason saw, carrying bowls, bones, drums and incense, "flowing by thick as Eels," "ever and implacably cruel, hiding, haunting, waiting,—known only to the blood-scented deserts of the Night."

Now consult again the wonderful quotation in *Vineland* from William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*:

> Secret retributions are always restoring the level, when disturbed, of the divine justice. It is impossible to tilt the beam. All the tyrants and proprietors and monopolists of the world in vain set their shoulders to heave the bar. Settles forever more the ponderous equator to its line, and man and mote, and star and sun, must range to it, or be pulverized by the recoil.

Except that in *Vineland*, just as the People's Republic of Rock and Roll failed to survive government repression in the '60s, so Zoyd Wheeler's "harbor of refuge" in the California redwoods fell in the '80s to narcs, RICOs, Reaganauts, tree-killers, earth-rapers, television anchorfaces, yuppie greedheads and the death-loving Wasteland thought police, in spite of the best efforts of kickass woman warrior DL Chastain, whose martial artistry included the Vibrating Palm, the Hidden Foot, the Enraged Sparrow and the "truly unspeakable" Gojira no Chimopira. And in our own brave new twenty-first century it's not only hard to find a spare Wobbly, but where did all the liberals go? If the gringos in their villas dream at all, it's of sugar-plum stock options. Never mind social justice, what happened to habeas corpus? Faith-based globocops police the words in our mouths and the behaviors in our bed while sorehead cable blabbercasters rant them on. Blood lust, wet dreams, collateral damage and extraordinary rendition; Halliburton and Abu Ghraib; an erotics of property, a theology of greed and a holy war on the poor, the old, the sick, the odd and the other—when oh when will the Tatzelwurm turn? None of this, of course, is news to Pynchon, which is why we're left with brilliant patter, fancy footwork, wishful thinking and a plaintive ukulele. ■

Not Dark Yet

MICHAEL WOOD

POINT TO POINT NAVIGATION: A Memoir, 1964 to 2006.
By Gore Vidal. Doubleday. 277 pp. $26.

"No one wants to be extinct," Gore Vidal writes in this second memoir of his life as a star of several sorts: novelist, essayist, playwright, screenwriter, actor, political candidate, political gadfly and celebrity among celebrities. It's clear that Vidal enjoys his fame, but perhaps not quite as much as what it allows him to say about other famous people. Tony Blair appears in *Point to Point Navigation* "looking smaller than life," offering "intricately banal" answers to journalists' questions. Johnny Carson, on the other hand, "was better looking than he looked" (because "clowning distorts regular features and his were most regular"). Federico Fellini "was a droll and inventive liar" and his "least favorite word" was "why." Vidal can never quite remember what his family relation to Al Gore is, "even though his father, a Tennessee senator, once explained it to me on television in San Francisco"; but he does manage this handsome tribute to Princess Margaret, the sister of the Queen of England: "She was stoic; nothing to be done but one can note her kindness to friends, to those employees whose pensions she paid out of fairly meager resources, not to mention her steadfast loyalty to a system that never in the end did as much for her as she sacrificed for it."

Extinct. Most of us are too worried about dying alone to wonder whether the species will go with us, and there seems to be a certain delusion of grandeur in even thinking along these lines. "How odd it must be *not* to be the self you have spent a lifetime perfecting. To vanish like Prospero into thin air, leaving behind pale understudies but no replacement." It's even odder perhaps to think of the self as perfect, but Vidal knows what he is saying. First, because if, as he says, "death is literally unimaginable," the world without us is also impossible to picture. What is it? "An empty room where one is not?" And second, because you can, it seems, survive your own species, or one of them. This book has scarcely begun before Vidal is telling us he "recently...observed to a passing tape recorder" that he was "once a famous novelist." The tape recorder makes reassuring noises about Vidal's continuing renown, but being a machine, it doesn't really get it. What Vidal means is not that he used to be famous but that the category "famous novelist" used to exist and is no more. "Thirty years ago, novels were actually read and discussed by those who did not write them, or, indeed, even read them." *Or even read them.* That's what fame is: to be known by people who don't know you. On the same page Vidal reports that when an interviewer asks him what Marilyn Monroe was really like, he doesn't hesitate to spill the purely supposititious beans. "As I barely knew her, I tell him."

"I have...never been my own subject," Vidal says early in this memoir. Can this be true? Surely no man ever so loved the sound of his own opinions. Here he tells us yet again that he calls his country the United States of Amnesia, that his definition of commercialism is "the ability to

Michael Wood teaches at Princeton. His most recent book is Literature and the Taste of Knowledge.

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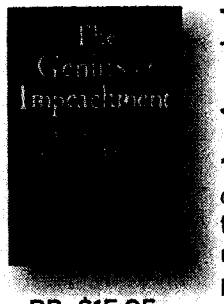

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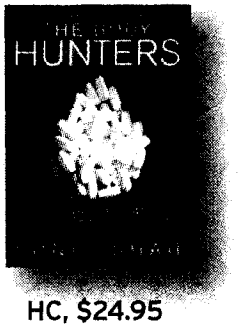

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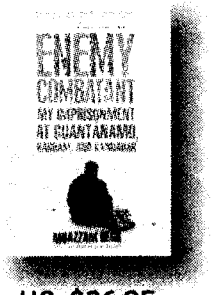

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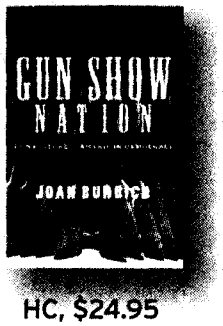

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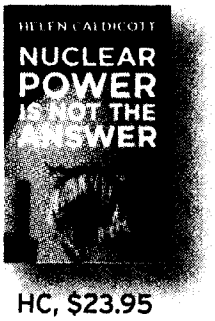

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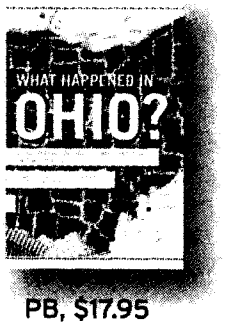

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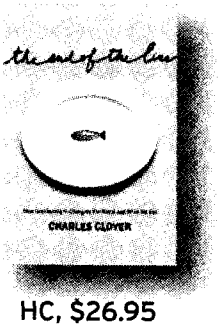

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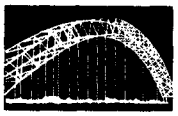

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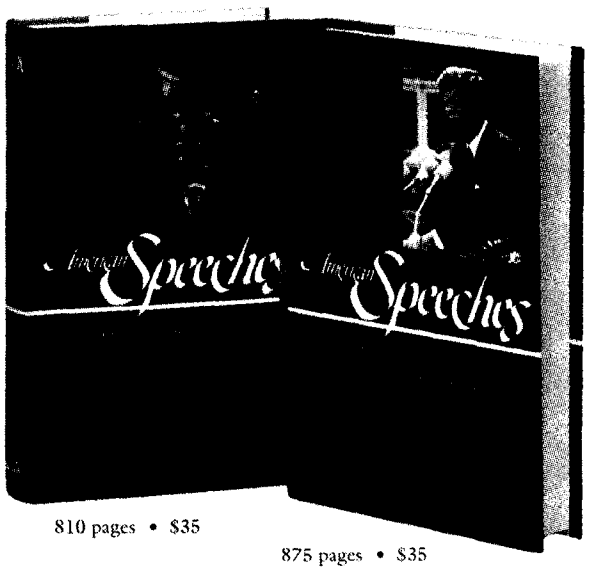

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do well what ought not to be done at all," and that "Yes: I did say Always a godfather, never a god." But opinions of course are not a life, and epigrams are not confessions. Even that perfected self turns out on inspection to be a series of masks, a range of "apparently conflicting identities." Vidal's two memoirs—*Palimpsest* was published in 1995—are about where he has been and what he has observed, not about who he is or why he isn't someone else. He is not his own subject except obliquely, and his deepest sorrows are registered through the behavior of others. At the death of Howard Austen, Vidal's partner of fifty-three years, the nurse weeps, and Vidal tells us simply, "I envied him—the WASP glacier had closed over my head." Of course, the glacier doesn't exclude emotion; it is a way of dealing with emotion, just as "heavy sleep," Vidal says, is his "natural response to the unbearable." But Austen's death, quite properly, is Austen's own, and the writing here manages to be both intimate and stately:

> Near the end he asked me, "How old am I?" I told him he was seventy-four. He frowned. "That's when people die, isn't it?" I said that I hadn't and so far he hadn't. I was sitting beside his armchair looking out over the tile roof opposite. For a moment he looked puzzled; then he said, "Didn't it go by awfully fast?" Of course it had. We had been too happy.

Vidal recently turned 81, an age at which anyone's life can seem full of the dying of others. He wonders at one moment whether he should call the book *Between Obituaries*. "Those of us whose careers began in the twentieth century are now rapidly fleeing the twenty-first, with good reason." Of course, we can flee without a reason, or with no better reason than mortality, but the sarcastic flick at the end of the sentence is Vidal's stylistic signature. It's there in his account of his actual title too. Point-to-point navigation is sailing among memorized landmarks when climatic conditions are too bad for you to chart a course, or when, as Vidal says, you have "a compass made inoperable by weather." The weather he has in mind is primarily political and historical: "All times are bad but some times are worse than others. This is one for our country." He is writing in "the awful year 2005" and carefully keeping track: "It is now April 2005"; "now it is September 2005." One of the (I imagine rather few) advantages of surviving your species is that you get to have the last word, "which is something," as Vidal says at the end of his novel *The Golden Age* (2000). Here in the memoir he has a lurid finale borrowed from Pope's *Dunciad*:

> Thy hand, great Anarch, lets the curtain fall,
> And universal Darkness buries all.

Vidal memorized these lines, and the ones that precede them, as a schoolboy at the Phillips Exeter Academy. Asked by a classmate why he bothered to learn the passage, he said, "Because it's bound to be apt one of these days." "And so it is today," he concludes, "January 1, 2006."

But it's not just the times that render the conventional compass inoperable. "Nonlinear lives make for awkward biographies," Vidal writes, and they make for rather rambling memoirs. If you are determined not to (or are perhaps unable to) explore or explain yourself, you can only shift among the points your memory or your current reflections tell you are interesting. This is bound to be an erratic affair for anyone. Vidal is funny about Garbo ("very rich and somewhat lazy"), Francis Ford Coppola (who asks Vidal, "Didn't you used to be older than me?") and the Warner Bros. studio ("known for its love of such traditions as the annual Christmas layoff"); but he is less compelling about the letters he gets or the books written about him or the movie he saw last night. Being a considerable

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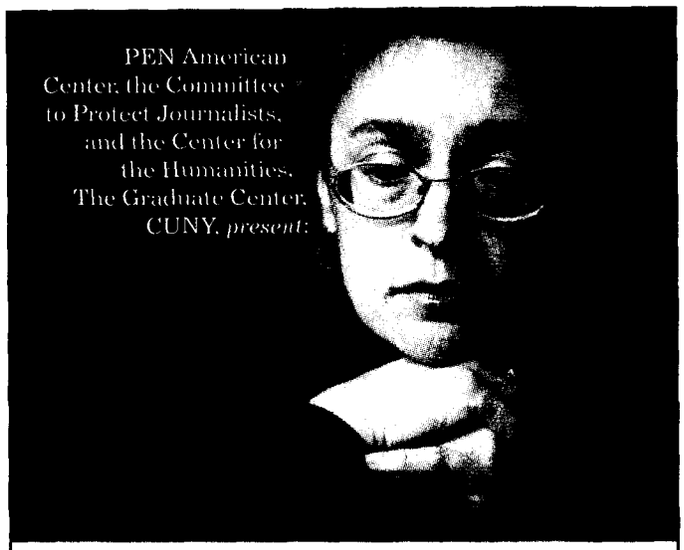
wit does not, alas, always prevent you from being an old codger.

Palimpsest notionally took Vidal, or his memories and anecdotes, from 1925 to 1964, and *Point to Point Navigation* just as notionally continues the story to the present day. But both titles give us fair warning. Time is going to fold over in these narratives, and in the second volume Vidal is still getting born, complete with shepherds and wise men and at least the chance of a Greek god in the offing: "Contrary to legend, I was born of mortal woman, and if Zeus sired me, there is no record on file in the Cadet Hospital at the U.S. Military Academy, West Point." The mortal woman gets short shrift in this volume, as she did in the earlier one ("at the end it was as if we had never known each other"). She did die within the purview of this book, though, in 1978, and she bequeathed her son at least one immortal line. When asked why she didn't marry a fourth time she said, "My first husband had three balls. My second, two. My third, one. Even *I* know enough not to press my luck." Vidal is more sympathetic to his father, or to the person who took Zeus's place in the records, and he doesn't need to insist on how much Gene Vidal's illness and death (in 1969) mattered to him. Gene was an aviator and a founder of airlines, and somewhere between his father's sky and his grandfather's Senate, the young Vidal found his America. Even here, however, a refreshing sarcasm steals the sentence and tints the romance: "I did know that senators spent their days in the Senate chamber passing bills—dollar bills, I thought—from one to another, by no means an entirely surreal image."

Meanwhile, back in 1964, Vidal still has things to do, books to write, places to go. *Myra Breckinridge* lies, or rolls, in the future, and so do all seven of the novels composing his *American Chronicles* series (*aka Narratives of Empire*). *The New York Review of Books*—where Vidal says he seems at one time "to have published an essay a week," an excellent rate for a paper that comes out twice a month—is only one year old. Vidal sells his house on the Hudson in 1969 and moves to Italy; then much later to the Hollywood Hills, or "cancer valley, as I think of California." To his own distaste he becomes much better known as an essayist than a novelist, and his political writing takes off. Always a little erratic in its targets, it is deeply consistent in its theme. The Republic has been betrayed, is always being betrayed, but we are not to give up hope. Even the weariest of Vidal's tropes on this subject has remnants of energetic interest. It's not that his theory of the Kennedy assassination ("Thus was the murder of JFK ordered and carried out by the same team that his brother was assembling to murder Castro") is all that new or so well represents "classic irony and on the bloodiest scale." It's that his idea of "the great fiction" of American political life is so thoroughly sound. The fiction is that "anything truly wicked, at least in the murder line, must be the work of a sole solitary 'nut' who is simply Evil." The implication is not that we should believe in the reality of every conspiracy or even of most conspiracies, but that a culture professing never to believe in any conspiracy is lost in the dark, or, worse, so busy conspiring it has to deny the very conditions of its own existence.

Vidal quotes Paul Bowles as saying a writer is "a spy sent into life by the forces of death," and thinks this is "a splendid metaphor" for Bowles's writing "at its best." What is attractive about Vidal's writing, and what keeps us reading it in spite of its dips and wanderings, is its brave and continuous affirmation that there are no forces of death. Death is just the end of what matters, a strange occlusion: "Of all the facts of life, death is the oddest." Odd because unreal, and therefore irrelevant, at least for the person who is doing the dying. In this memoir Vidal continues to spy on life from life's point of view. ■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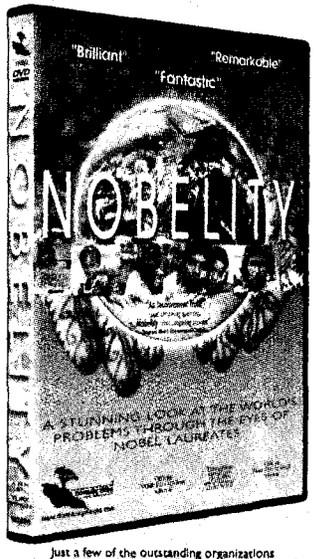

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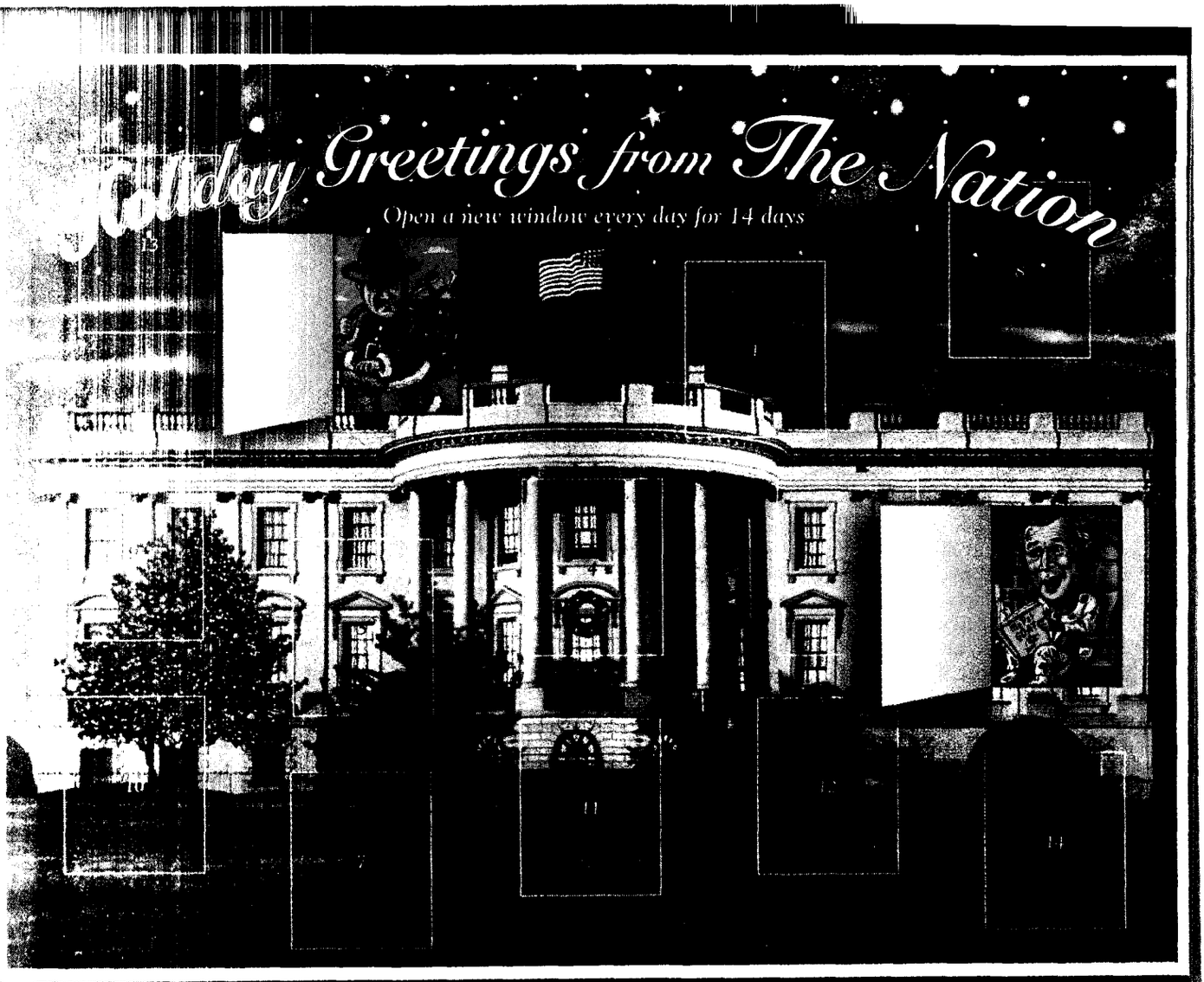

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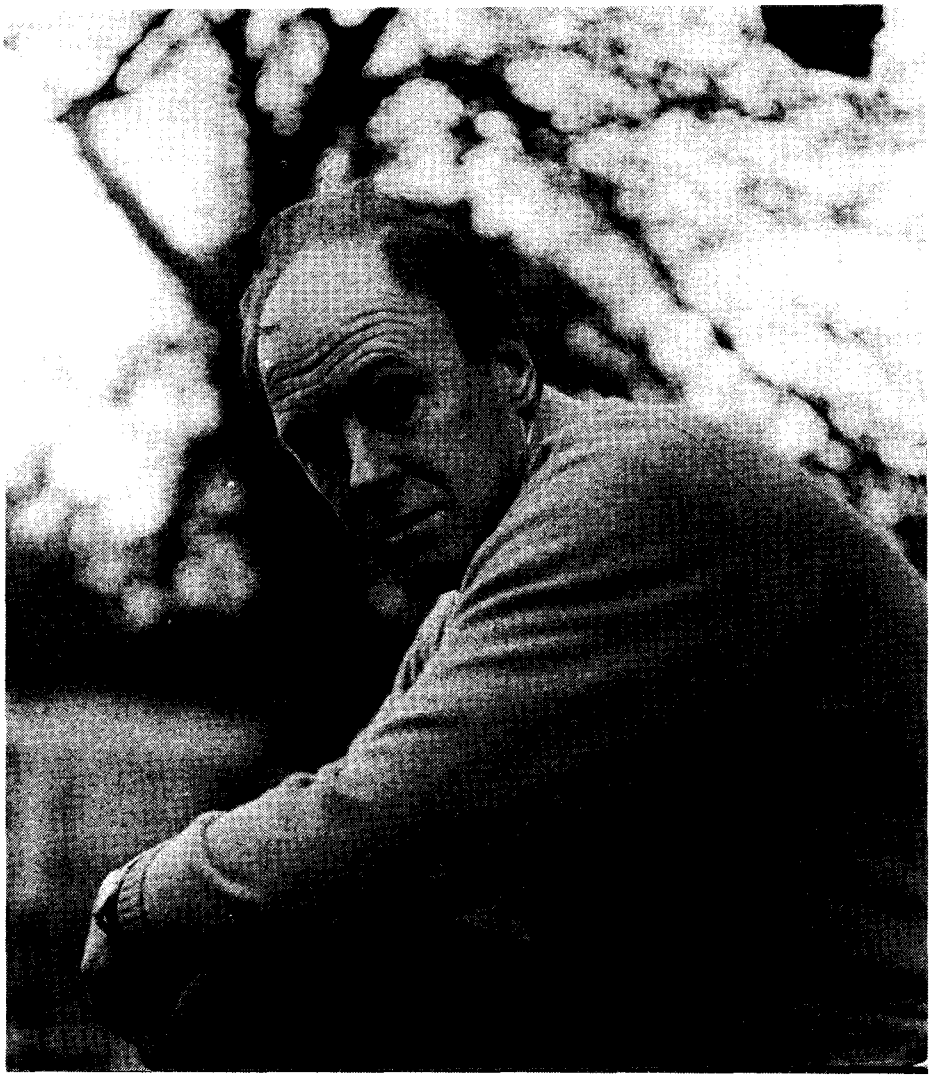

JERRY BAUER

Getting Even

STEPHEN AMIDON

COLLECTED STORIES. By Roald Dahl. Everyman's Library. 850 pp. $30.

If you want to understand the astonishing darkness at the heart of Roald Dahl's stories for adults, you would do well to look at his World War II service—not his well-documented role as an RAF pilot in the early days of the conflict but rather his less-heralded posting as an assistant air attaché at the British Embassy in Washington. It was here, far away from enemy fire, that the cynical worldview that informs Dahl's adult fiction just might have been born. Serving alongside future advertising mogul David Ogilvy, *Horatio Hornblower* author C.S. Forester and philosopher Isaiah Berlin, Dahl found himself plunged into the sophisticated network of espionage, propaganda, blackmail and sexual intrigue the British used against their American allies to insure they stayed the course in the great struggle against fascism. The lesson was simple—even the best of friends were entitled to lie and cheat if the stakes were high enough.

The budding writer seems to have taken this lesson to heart, because it is difficult to think of another bestselling author who presents a more comprehensively pessimistic view of humanity than the one on display in these fifty-two tales of humiliation, betrayal and revenge. Of course, readers of Dahl's children's books will have caught plenty of glimpses of this darkness. For example, there is that sublimely subversive moment in *The Witches* when the narrator suggests that "your lovely school-teacher who is reading these words to you at this very moment" might be a grotesque, child-slaughtering witch in disguise. But in the children's books this cynicism is always tempered by the presence of a wise grandparent, kindly giant or sly fox. No such relief is on offer in Dahl's *Collected Stories*. Readers who like to take their humor black, without a sprinkle of diluting sweetness, will consume this book with immense satisfaction.

Due to its strict chronological arrangement, the collection opens with ten stories inspired by Dahl's RAF piloting days, written either during or directly after the war. These are by far the book's weakest entries, their pathos and propaganda only partially concealed by the tough-guy prose that often reads like it won honorable mention in a Hemingway imitation contest. Here is a brave young pilot's reaction to being ordered out on a dangerous mission in "Death of an Old Old Man": "The others were all sitting around eating their pudding; mine was still on my plate in front of me, and I couldn't take another mouthful. But it was fine when I tightened my jaw muscles and said 'Thank God for that. I'm tired of sitting around here picking my nose.' It was certainly fine when I said that." Pudding, indeed.

Dahl finally hits his stride with "Nunc Dimittis," written in 1947 and marking the opening of the thirteen-year period that was to prove the most productive of his adult-fiction career. (The story's title comes from the Book of Luke and basically means "I can go now, I have accomplished my life's mission.") In it, an amoral art collector takes revenge on the woman who jilted him by carefully orchestrating her humiliation at a posh dinner party, only to have her strike back with an even more decisive reprisal. This dark, perfectly balanced tale provides the template for much of what is to come. In Dahl's stories, the core family values are not respect and love but torment and retribution. Intimacy doesn't just breed contempt; it breeds contempt in action. This is particularly true when the topic is marriage. In the justly famous "William and Mary," a woman suffers her husband's petty tyr-

Stephen Amidon is the author, most recently, of Human Capital, *a novel.*

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anny for years, only to get her chance for payback when he arranges for his brain to be posthumously placed in a state of suspended animation. In "The Way Up to Heaven," another downtrodden wife takes her revenge when her torturer/spouse gets stuck in an elevator in their six-story Manhattan mansion. In the deliriously funny "Neck," a cuckolded husband named Sir Basil Turton is handed the opportunity to get even with his gold-digging, unfaithful wife after her head becomes stuck in one of their Henry Moore sculptures while she is frolicking with a lover. The story's subtly wicked climax comes when the narrator watches Sir Basil's butler, Jelks, who loathes Lady Turton for betraying his beloved master, arrive with two tools, one that will cleanly extract her, the other that will cause damage to more than just the sculpture:

> Sir Basil took up a position close to his lady's head, waiting for Jelks. Jelks advanced slowly, carrying a saw in one hand, an axe in the other, and he stopped maybe a yard away. Then he held out both implements in front of him so his master could choose, and there was a brief moment—no more than two or three seconds—of silence, and of waiting, and it just happened that I was watching Jelks at this time. I saw the hand that was carrying the axe come forward an extra fraction of an inch towards Sir Basil. It was so slight a movement it was barely noticeable—a tiny pushing forward of the hand, slow and secret, a little offer, a little coaxing offer that was accompanied perhaps by an infinitesimal lift of the eyebrow.

Besides their themes of betrayal and revenge, Dahl's best stories also share a deeply traditional attitude toward narrative technique. Largely ignoring "developments" in storytelling, Dahl instead carried on the tradition of O. Henry and Saki, centering his story on the twist, the sting in the tail, the comeuppance. He also liberally employed the plot device of the bet to just about perfect effect—any writing teacher would do well to use Dahl's "wager stories" to teach dramatic pacing. "Man from the South," for example, features a bet between a wealthy South American exile and a US Navy sailor over whether the latter can ignite his lighter ten times in a row. The stakes soon spiral out of control as the rich man's Cadillac is wagered against the little finger on the sailor's left hand. In "Taste," an apparently harmless bet about wine-tasting escalates to the point where a stockbroker stakes his teenage daughter against a food critic's two houses. And in "Dip in the Pool," a passenger on a cruise liner attempts to win the betting pool on the ship's daily progress by flinging himself overboard in the hope that the boat will turn back to rescue him, and thereby enable his lowball bet to sweep in the winnings.

Dahl's fiction for adults went into serious decline during the 1960s and never recovered. There are several reasons for this. The most obvious is the runaway success of *James and the Giant Peach* (1961) and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964), which cemented his reputation as a children's writer. But there are artistic considerations as well. By this time, his old-school narrative methods and sick-joke ethos had dropped out of favor, leaving little room for him in magazines like *The New Yorker* and *Harper's*. Also, explicit sex was now part of the authorial repertory, and Dahl's misanthropic sneer proved unsettling when it came to depicting the frankly erotic. The aging artist was unable to get in tune with his times. In the four long stories he published in *Playboy* in the 1960s and '70s (later collected in *Switch Bitch*), this most assured of writers seems completely out of his league as he moves from the realm of country estates and society parties to a brave new world of wife-swapping, rough trade and aphrodisiac colognes. This failure of authorial command is apparent in "The Great Switcheroo," the story of two suburban men who arrange to sleep with each other's wives without the women knowing. As the narrator looks out over the women at a cocktail party, he thinks he can see hidden lust and sensuality expressed in their mouths, though all Dahl can communicate to the reader is a sort of clinical ugliness:

> It really does seem to be a fact, I told myself, as my eyes wandered from lower lip to lower lip across the room, that all the less attractive traits of the human animal, arrogance, rapacity, gluttony, lasciviousness, and the rest of them, are clearly signalled in the little carapace of scarlet skin. But you have to know the code. The protuberant or bulging lower lip is supposed to signify sensuality. But this is only half true in men and wholly untrue in women. In women, it is the thin line you should look for, the narrow blade with the sharply delineated bottom edge. And in the nymphomaniac there is a tiny just visible crest of skin at the top centre of the lower lip.
>
> Samantha, my hostess, had that.

Look at the words he chooses—"carapace," "protuberant," "blade." This is the language of the autopsy, the vivisection, not the erotic. "Bitch" proves equally dissonant. In it, a renegade perfumer invents a musklike scent that turns all men into rapists the moment they smell it. Although the narrator's scheme to bring down the American President by applying it to the corsage of a stout grand dame as she greets him is quite funny, it is far more difficult to stomach the scene in which a young boxer rapes a lab assistant during a product test, much to her moist-eyed delight. The discomfort level rises even higher in "The Last Act," one of the most unsettling accounts of sexual humiliation I have ever read. In it, a middle-aged woman named Anna falls into a deep depression after her husband's accidental death. During a trip to Dallas, she looks up an old boyfriend named Conrad, who is now a successful divorced gynecologist. Although she threw him over for her husband decades earlier, Anna figures that the intervening years would have healed any wound. Conrad does indeed come on initially as the personification of charm, though he soon uses his medical knowledge to exact a revenge on Anna that is so brutal it is just about unreadable. As with "Bitch" and "Switcheroo," the ugliness is now unrelieved by the buoyant wit on display in "Neck," "Taste" and "William and Mary." It is little wonder that this was the time when both Dahl and his readers turned their attention to childish things.

Despite its sour final sequence, one comes away from this generous collection with a deep admiration for Dahl's narrative virtuosity and his pitch-black humor, but also with an understanding of why it is his books for children, and not his short story collections, that sell tens of millions of copies. In the former, the nasty is always offset by the humane, the dark by the light. For every Grand High Witch there is a Grandmamma; for every Miss Trunchbull there is a Miss Honey. No such relief is on offer in his adult fiction. Perhaps the clearest example of this comes in "Pig," whose hero, a sweet-natured vegetarian orphan named Lexington, could easily have found his way into one of Dahl's books for young readers, where he would have no doubt won the day. In the grown-up world, however, he winds up hanging upside down in an abattoir with blood running out of his slit throat. It is a position in which only readers who like their literary meat served bloody and rare would want to see their hero end. ■

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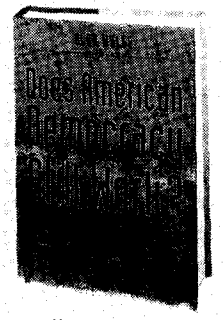

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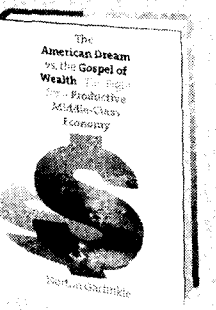

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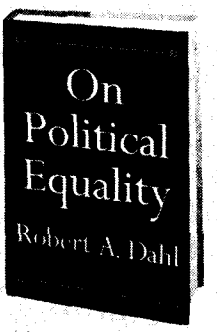

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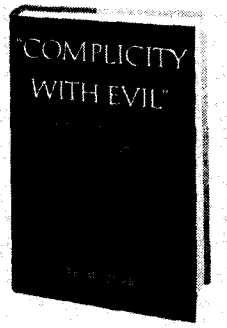

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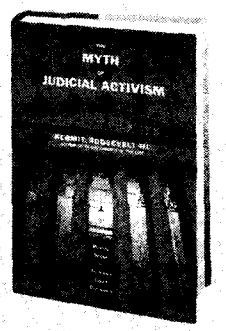

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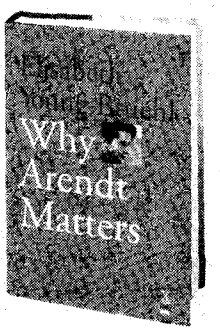

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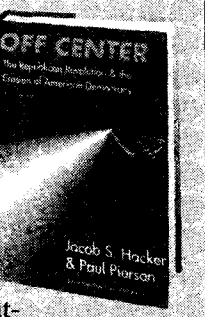

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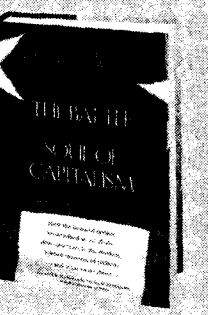

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I Can't Get No Satisfaction

CHRISTINE SMALLWOOD

THE FEMALE THING: Dirt, Sex, Envy, Vulnerability.
By Laura Kipnis. Pantheon. 173 pp. $23.95.

Once upon a time, half a century ago, American women washed dishes, packed lunches and, being good housewives, downed a pill or two to get through the day. Slowly, a panic overtook the gentler sex: *Is this it?* The dam broke open. Books were written, meetings were called, marches were marched. Rights—abortion, maternity leave, Title IX, sexual discrimination policies—were won. Brandishing said rights, women stormed the workplace, the halls of Congress, even the armed forces. And while inappropriate squeezes, delayed promotions and a few firings betrayed their second-class status, they persisted. They had arrived. Thirty years later, a generation of new women—young women—entered the workforce expecting to be treated as equals, despite—or was it because of?—the fact that they shaved their underarms. But they still only made 81 cents on the dollar of their male co-workers. They still had to do an awful load of dishes at night. And when there were babies to be had, well, they were the ones staying home and nodding off to *Teletubbies*. They were disappointed, and confused. Was this that glorious future that been promised them?

And then Laura Kipnis opened her laptop, and lo, it was good. Now the author of *Against Love: A Polemic*, a smart and brackish book that brought this hitherto unknown feminist scholar and video artist to the attention of *The New Yorker* and half the blogosphere, has struck again. Her new book, *The Female Thing*, examines the very question our tale leaves hanging: What happened to gender equality? Why has the movement that once seemed a matter of destiny kind of, well, broken down?

Kipnis turns a mirror on women, observing that if they wanted to smash the patriarchy, they probably could, given their sheer number—so could it be that maybe they don't *want* to? Perhaps, she ventures, women ought to stop blaming men and get reacquainted with the "collaborator within," the one who cleans feverishly, obsesses over her supposed flaws and maybe isn't so sure she wants to be liberated—whatever that means—after all.

Kipnis devotes a chapter to each of four "topographies": envy, dirt, sex and vulnerability. They're linked not so much by a universal thesis (no phallic metanarratives here!) but by a methodology that examines how each has been reimagined over time to serve different purposes. Relying heavily on anecdote, and writing in a style even more befitting cocktail chatter than the very chatty *Against Love*, she skips around, bouncing from sociological studies to her own observations to the history books. Her goal throughout is to reveal each idea's continued hold over women's imaginations, as well as their refashionings over time. In this way she demonstrates that they are stories, not facts, and no matter how powerful, subject to debate.

And the terms of the debate are political. In *Against Love*, Kipnis used her ostensible subject—modern romance and the thrills of infidelity—to critique the political economy of late capitalism. Americans, she argued, burden love by expecting their partners to fulfill every last one of their needs, and resorting to submission, surveillance and the curtailment of freedoms when necessary. It was no accident, argued Kipnis—a Marxist *and* Freudian—that these conditions are "remarkably convergent with those of a cowed workforce and a docile electorate." Accordingly, she urged those shackled by the chains of "companionate coupledom" to jump out of their partners' beds and into bed with other partners. *The Female Thing* similarly critiques our capitalist system, pointing out that women's increased independence from men may amount to little more than shifting that dependency "to the vagaries of the job market: to bosses, customers and time clocks." In other words, feminism, which once dared to imagine a radical redistribution of goods and resources, has "succumbed to the winner-take-all logic of a winner-take-all economy." Women have not changed the nature of the capitalist workforce but merely adapted to it; she goes even farther, briskly asserting that female wages are up "*because* male wages are down"—so much for "real" gains.

Kipnis's subject is not sexual difference per se; she assumes a certain difference between men and women, but she's less interested in theorizing that difference than in unpacking the female psyche. Or at least her psyche. In the prologue she states plainly that she's confined herself to a white, middle- or upper-middle-class experience, and then more or less admits that it's her own that's on display—a read on the culture at large refracted through self-analysis. The book is not about love, or about straight romance; since it's about women, though, it is necessarily about men, and the ways that the former relate to the latter—as lovers, partners or simply the ones with the power. It is noticeably silent on female-female relationships of any kind, be they familial, friendly or sexual.

To be a woman, in Kipnis's telling, is to be in some way *insufficient*. She states flat out that femininity—premised on the belief that female disadvantage is inevitable and women ought to turn it into an advantage of sorts—and feminism—the effort to eliminate inequality—are irreconcilable. As femininity depends on the idea that women come up short (there is always something to be fixed, or curled, or straightened, or waxed, or otherwise maintained), it hinges on a lack in women's lives. *Something* is missing—and judging from the popularity of the knife these days, she says, one might assume that "something" comes in size DD.

> A better name for contemporary femininity would be the feminine-industrial complex, a vast psychocommercial conglomerate financed by women themselves (though any sex can profiteer) and devoted to churning out fantastic solutions to the alarming array of psychological problems you didn't know you had ("Are You a Love Addict?" "Do You Have Night Eating Syndrome?"); social hazards you hadn't even considered...and bodily imperfections previously overlooked.... Why, it's almost as if the whole female condition hinged on some kind of ontological *flaw*...something's always *broken*.... Something needs *improving*: your lingerie, your stress levels, your orgasms (or lack of them). Are you in a "toxic friendship"? Is your career in the doldrums? Is your boyfriend lying to you?... stop doubting yourself! (Self-doubt is *not* attractive.) Take this quiz, buy this amazing new moisturizing deodorant (underarms get dry, too!), wax your eyebrows: you'll feel *a lot better* once you do.

This monologue recalls an oft-cited nine-page passage in *Against Love* in which Kipnis enumerated all the things you're not allowed to do when you're in a couple: sleep late, not make the bed, not care about not making the bed and so forth. She is clearly a wonderful mimic, although occasionally she overdoes the shtick (men are

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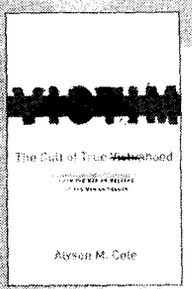

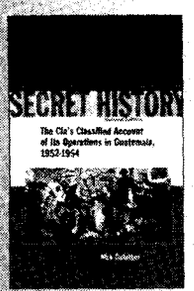

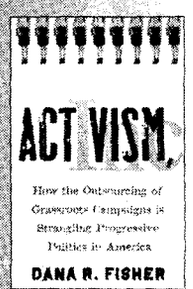

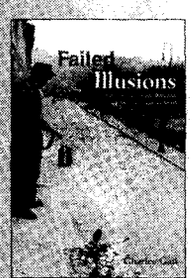

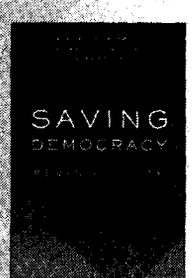

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"playing cleaning chicken: you know, the game where whoever blinks first ends up vacuuming" seems more dutiful than felt). But on the whole her writing crackles: When it's good, it's very, very good; when it's nasty, it's better.

While it's easy for ladies to turn to men believing they hold this missing piece, when women do attain whatever it is they thought they wanted—a seat in the corporate boardroom, that law degree—they sometimes find it's not what they wanted after all. They still want more. They still feel that "thing" nagging at them:

> It's sometimes been suggested that lacking the body part that confers social advantage puts the female sex, on the whole, in a slightly *resentful* position, which may occasionally express itself in a degree of "overmanagement" when it comes to such domestic interactions, or a heightened focus on trivialities, as if small things mattered...enormously. This is, needless to say, a scurrilous stereotype, though who wouldn't be resentful about being handed the anatomical short straw, so to speak, at least until the happy day when having a shorter straw *finally stops mattering*, a day that has not quite arrived, despite all the wonderful social progress and everything.

There is an obvious difference between men and women, and Kipnis sensibly acknowledges that you don't have to be an essentialist earth-mother goddess to know it. Political difference is a consequence of sexual difference, but one of those things is mutable while the other is not; we ought to be able to get a decent living wage and affordable childcare without turning the current equipment inside out, thank you very much. And you don't have to be in straight-as-an-arrow lust after men to want what they've got and scapegoat them for having it. With a nod to Nietzsche, she explains: "You denounce the source of your pain but still want what he *has*, or at least you think you do, which creates a sort of perverse psychological bond."

Kipnis proceeds by way of opposites: Femininity clashes with feminism; the clitoral is at odds with the vaginal; motherhood is opposed to career; dirt is obviously in dialogue with cleanliness. She flips each back and forth, noting the way the cure—feminism—has begun to look "an awful lot like the disease." That is, the "something's missing" that propelled women's entry into the workforce is related to the "something's missing" that inspires full-body waxing. It's a conclusion that has the aha! effect of articulating the incompatibility between feminism and femininity, but also the troubling effect of elucidating feminism's dependence on femininity's anti-feminism. (Got that?) In her chapter on dirt, she argues that women—widely regarded as the dirtier sex for most of human history—were transformed by the nineteenth-century cult of domesticity and virtue, charged with both cleaning up and cleaning after men. Now they obsessively scrub away at countertops to cleanse themselves of that remaining impurity—not only the impurities that affect everyone, like defecating, but, of course, menstruation. Kipnis doesn't have any prescriptions for how to get over the dirt-fixation, but please, if any readers would like some advice on how to let the dust build up, I'm available for tutorials.

She is quite good, and very entertaining, in her chapter on sex, which addresses the vaginal/clitoral debate and asks why it is that in these zippy, liberated times, so many women report being deeply dissatisfied sexually. (It is the chapter on sex that confines itself mostly to the trials of straight women, although it advertises life on the other side when Kipnis quotes a researcher who wonders why, if so few women get pleasure from intercourse, they are sexually attracted to men at all.) Given the tiny number of women satisfied by intercourse, plus the fact that "orgasms have become an index of female progress," it should come as no surprise that women get so worked up about whether they're having them, how many they're having and what kind they are. As British post-punkers Gang of Four put it in "Contract," a very danceable song given its rather socially conscious content, "Our bodies make us worry."

The evolutions (or is it convolutions?) in ideas about women's bodies and desires throughout history have not been prompted by new anatomical discoveries but by new social ideals: The female orgasm, believed necessary for conception in medieval times, fell out of fashion in the eighteenth century, when it was "rediscovered" as a doctor-administered remedy for "hysteria." More modern debates center not on *if* women experience pleasure but on *how often* they do, and *how*. Even feminists have argued that we ought to be doing our business according to certain rules—both Simone de Beauvoir and Germaine Greer dismissed the manual orgasm, with the latter referring to use of the hand as "pompous and deliberate" (as if pleasure were supposed to be some kind of accident). In our own era, the much-lauded (assuming you can find it) G-spot is trumpeted as an example of the female equipment's superiority; the clitoris is now so popular that some doctors say that actually, men have one, too—a tube inside the penis. "Clearly it's not simply achieving sexual pleasure that's the issue for women," Kipnis concludes. "It's also achieving some kind of narrative coherence about it."

It's not the "truth" of the matter that interests Kipnis—whether or not we all have a G-spot, or hey, maybe men have one too, right next to that clitoral tube—but what it means that we *want* to have one, that we quarrel about it and insist on "working" on finding it. (If there's one thing she can't abide, it's work: *The Female Thing* skewers the sexpert advice industry; *Against Love* railed against introducing the "language of the factory" into relationships. Kipnis herself prefers to spend her downtime on more leisurely pursuits, like writing popular books and articles for *Slate* and the *New York Times*.) It's the stories we tell about our bodies that fascinate her, and one of the "things" she relishes is challenging conventional wisdom—particularly conventional wisdom in staid feminist circles. For instance, Kipnis, who has written extensively on pornography, sees *Deep Throat* not as a tale of female subjugation but as a fantasy about a "universe where men and women get pleasure from doing the same things.... Pornography's critics take porn very literally, as if it purports to be social realism," she continues, "but a better comparison would be sci-fi.... Besides, what's so great about reality anyway, and if realism can't compete with pornography, why is it porn that's supposed to do the apologizing?"

Kipnis's final chapter takes women to task for perpetuating the notion that they're vulnerable—that is, vulnerable to rape. She argues that the incarcerated, including men—especially African-American men—are more likely to be raped than women on the street. Why, then, does rape literature continue to propagate the idea that women constantly face the threat of attack? Again, it's a transformation of a current of feminism into part of the problem, disseminating the idea that women are so many shrinking violets. And as the notion of "injury" in sexual harassment has expanded, so too, Kipnis claims, have the "opportunities to be injured." She very entertainingly slaps Naomi Wolf for her 2004 *New York* magazine story about how, twenty-one years earlier, Yale literary giant Harold Bloom had ruined her college career—she, one of his disciples—by putting his "heavy, boneless hand" on her leg. Pointing out Wolf's refusal to acknowledge the power she had over Bloom, and lampooning her for making a mountain out of one

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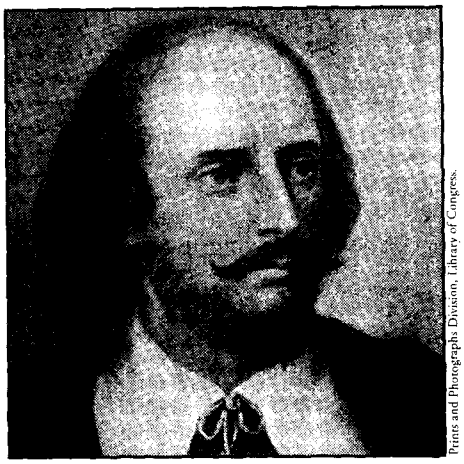

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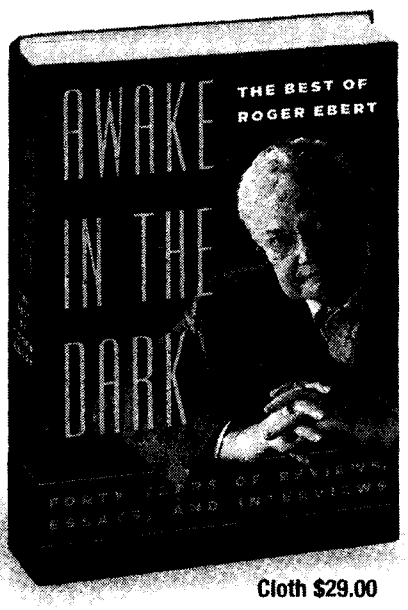

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Foreword by David Bordwell

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boneless hand, Kipnis says that "the real question about the phallus these days is whether it's something men try to put over on women or whether women endow men with phallic prowess in order to keep desiring—and disdaining—them."

Of course, she has been accused of blaming the victim (and of failing to issue a Five Year Plan for feminist progress). But there is a fair dose of medicine underneath the heaping spoonful of sugar—er, I mean, salt. If said victim can toughen up and take some heat for the three hours required to read *The Female Thing*, she may find herself nodding vigorously in agreement, or underlining a passage or two. And surely the other half of the species might possibly benefit from peering down this microscope. (Perish the thought, a man reading a book about *women*? Have no gigantic tomes of World War II history been published this month?!) After all, we are each of us, for now, at least, of woman born. Which may account for the possibility that, in Kipnis's words, "Misogyny is basically just the need for mother-raised humans to overthrow the residues of early female domination, and men aren't going to give up ruling the world until women stop ruling over childhood.... Unfortunately, women *can't* stop ruling over childhood—because we have those maternal instincts to mollify. Also because no one else will do it, of course."

Maybe it's putting it a bit strongly to argue that unequal distribution of child-rearing labor and subsequent maternal tyranny are locked in a vicious cycle with grown-up misogyny. (Far be it from me to accuse Laura Kipnis of overstating her case to make a point.) But there's no question that this "female thing" structures not only half of our whole lives, but the relationships, and the world, that we—women *and* men—share. Her unusually smart, thoroughly entertaining grasp of the contradictions and ambivalences of modern-day feminism ought, at the very least, make this "female thing" of interest to us all. ■

The Collaborator

DAVID A. BELL

THE UNFREE FRENCH: Life Under the Occupation.
By Richard Vinen. Yale. 476 pp. $35.

BAD FAITH: A Forgotten History of Family, Fatherland, and Vichy France.
By Carmen Callil. Knopf. 607 pp. $30.

What is it about Vichy France that still exerts such a strong hold on the Western imagination? Publishers bring out large, well-reviewed histories of Vichy at regular intervals. It remains an irresistible setting for historical fiction, as shown by the success of Alan Furst's novels, which return again and again to wartime France. Films about Vichy, from *Casablanca* and *The Sorrow and the Pity* to *The Last Metro* and *Au revoir les enfants*, attract large and enthusiastic audiences. Just this year, the gorgeous, heartbreakingly incomplete novel *Suite Française* by Irène Némirovsky (a Jew whom Vichy deported to the death camps), finally published after lying for decades in a suitcase her daughters found too painful to open, appeared in English translation to rapturous critical acclaim.

In some respects, the attention seems disproportionate. Vichy was a dreadful regime, but just one among many during a dreadful period of human history, and surely one that occupies a lesser realm of horror than Hitler's Germany or Stalin's Soviet Union. Its worst crime, the deportation of some 76,000 Jews to the death camps, involved only a little more than 1 percent of the Jews murdered in the Holocaust—nor did the French operate death camps themselves. Why, then, does Vichy remain such an unusually compelling subject, especially in the United States and Britain? Is it simply that more Americans and Britons speak French than German? Or perhaps there is a double standard at work: The French, unlike the Germans, are "civilized" and so should have "known better."

I think there is a different, more fundamental reason, which has to do precisely with the lesser horror and greater moral ambiguity of Vichy. French singer Jean-Jacques Goldman once wrote a song that begins: "If I had been born in '17 in Leiden-

David A. Bell, author of The First Total War *(Houghton Mifflin), is Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities at Johns Hopkins.*

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stadt/On the ruins of a battlefield/Would I have been better or worse than those people/Had I been German?" The question is simply too painful for most people to confront, because the answer seems all too obvious, and too damning. If they had been born German in 1917, they would likely have become Nazis, or cowards complicit in Hitler's crimes. When faced with this probability, the process of sympathetic identification that draws us into the past is simply blocked.

But what if they—what if you—had been born in 1917 in France, and then experienced the catastrophic defeat of 1940, when the Wehrmacht simply steered around the famed Maginot line and conquered France in a matter of weeks? Would you have fled to fight with de Gaulle? Joined the Resistance? Supported the puppet regime of Marshal Philippe Pétain? Not only were such choices all the more dramatic for being suddenly thrust on the French; they seem more psychologically plausible as well. It is much easier to imagine oneself failing a moral test and turning "collabo" in 1940 than slowly, steadily participating in the Nazi evil from the start. This may be one reason the "collabos" are often the most vividly sketched characters in Vichy fiction and film (think of Captain Renault in *Casablanca*, or Lucien in Louis Malle's *Lacombe Lucien*), and why figures like Pétain, his Foreign Minister Pierre Laval and now Louis Darquier, the regime's notoriously anti-Semitic second commissioner for Jewish affairs and the subject of Carmen Callil's extraordinary book *Bad Faith*, have received such intense biographical scrutiny. It is surely one reason images of female collaborators having their heads shaved at the liberation, as in Robert Capa's famous photograph of 1944, remain some of the most searing and psychologically resonant ones of the entire war. It is all too easy to see ourselves in their place.

In the introduction to *The Unfree French*, a general history of Vichy France from the perspective of ordinary people, Richard Vinen protests the very idea of putting himself in his subjects' shoes. "When I was working on the French social elite during the Second World War," he writes, "survivors of that period (usually Pétainists), would sometimes ask me what I would have done if I had found myself in their position. This is an understandable but futile question. If I had been alive in France in 1940 I would have been a different person and how I would have reacted would have depended on the social and political

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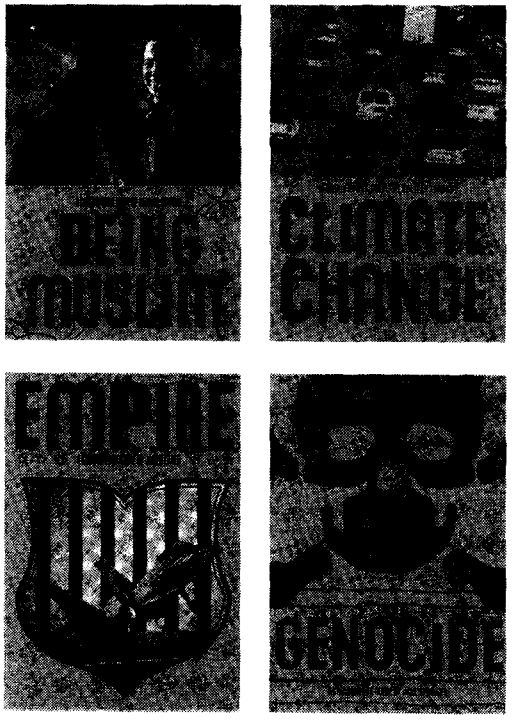

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circumstances of my upbringing." Vinen is right, of course, but he is too sanguine about his ability—or anyone's—to avoid the question. Identifying with individuals in the past is central to the writing of good history, and to the experience of reading it. It is precisely for this reason that Vichy, a name that once signified nothing but a strong-tasting type of mineral water, has now come to signify such a strong-tasting morality tale.

Practicing what he preaches, Vinen not only guards against identifying with his subjects; he avoids judging them almost entirely. Indeed, in the classic British empiricist tradition, he is leery of generalization of any sort, implying at one point that a great deal of Vichy's history still defies understanding: "Much of what people said and did under Vichy...remains inscrutable." He likes nothing better than to take a particular topic—the flight of refugees from Paris and other cities in 1940, forced labor in Germany, collaboration, resistance, the liberation—and explain sternly that its complexity and variety make general conclusions almost impossible. Vinen declares at the outset that "I am interested in the French rather than in France...how the French lived rather than abstract ideals," and he concentrates as much as possible on people's ordinary experience. His approach is deliberately episodic.

In some respects, this approach works well, for Vichy's history is indeed far more complex than its popular image suggests. After the sudden and catastrophic defeat of May–June 1940, France did not simply fall under German occupation. Different areas, including Paris, came under various German and Italian administrations, while Germany forcibly annexed the region of Alsace-Lorraine (130,000 of its men went on to serve in the German armed forces, mostly on the Eastern front). Meanwhile, a large area in the south remained autonomous and theoretically neutral until November 1942, governed from the old spa town of Vichy under the leadership of the aged World War I hero Pétain. This "Vichy regime" had a role in running the occupied zones as well, but under conditions of continuous bureaucratic chaos, disarray and infighting. The histories of these different zones involve at least as much murkiness and confusion as they do stark moral choices.

Vinen has a keen eye for incidents whose sheer absurdity shows just how chaotic and unpredictable things were. For instance, a Canadian insurance company, taking Vichy's theoretical neutrality at face value, continued to pay Pétain a pension throughout the war. Meanwhile, the French children's magazine *Le Journal de Mickey*, with support from Walt Disney, not only went on publishing but solemnly instructed French children in their duty to "the Marshal." So complex were Vichy's criteria for Jewishness, and so rigid the racial bureaucracy, that one woman was deported from France and sent all the way to Auschwitz, only to persuade officials there of her "Aryan" status, upon which they returned her safely home. Meanwhile, on the grounds of the Auschwitz-Birkenau complex, an idealistic young French scoutmaster set up a model camp for "volunteer" French workers, leading them in songs, games and exercises that were occasionally disturbed by the smell of burning flesh. The scoutmaster later turned out to be a Gaullist spy.

Vichy's continuing fascination lies in the fact that its history was marked as much by murkiness and confusion as by stark moral choices.

Beyond the confusion and unpredictability, Vinen is particularly good at evoking the privations and hardships that served as the backdrop to nearly all French lives between 1940 and 1944. He waxes eloquent on subjects like ration cards, waiting in line (you could pay a mother seven francs an hour to wait for you; her children would deliver the provisions) and the black market. He explains persuasively that farmers endured their own share of hardships and did not enjoy a plenty denied to city dwellers. He recounts the plot of a novel whose intellectual hero, having gone hungry for too long, declares with bathos: "My son will run a dairy." He also reveals that Parisians kept 400,000 rabbits on their balconies as a source of food.

When Vinen takes the time to sketch out individual characters and incidents, his book is especially instructive and revealing. He gives a lively account of collaborationist crime and figures like the gangster Henri Lafont (who counted a black singer and a German Jew among his mistresses, and eventually volunteered to fight in the SS). Vinen also makes a fascinating comparison between three young French Jews who survived the war, showing the determining effect that their prewar social status had on their experiences. Unfortunately, however, much of the book moves too quickly for its own good. To take just one example, in his section on the "exodus" of June 1940, when as many as 8 million people fled their homes (including more than two-thirds of the population of Paris), Vinen seldom devotes more than a sentence to any single person or story. It is an admittedly unfair comparison, but Némirovsky's *Suite Française* gives a far more vivid sense of the chaos, confusion and anguish of this moment, and of the variety of individual experiences.

More serious, Vinen's allergy to generalization often leaves him with little to say that does not sound simply obvious: "German troops in France were not all the same"; "French people often discussed how they should deal with the Germans"; "Prison camps changed over time." At the end of the book, he writes: "The first and simplest conclusion of this book is that life for most French people between 1940 and 1944 was miserable." Did we doubt it? True, some historians of late have put relatively little emphasis on the hardships, but the basic facts have not been in question.

Most surprising, while Vinen details the many different ways the French dealt with the German occupiers, including political collaboration, sexual contacts, forced labor in Germany and bureaucratic connections, he almost entirely avoids the subject of resistance. He has an entire chapter on French laborers in Germany, but nothing at all on the "Free French" forces in England. And he provides only five pages on the organized Resistance itself—half the amount given over to the head-shavings of 1944–45, and scarcely more than on the black market, or standing in line. True, the book explicitly concerns "the bulk of the population" who did not actively resist, and is partly set against the old myth, long discredited by historians but still tenaciously upheld in some fiction, that France was a "nation of resisters." But in downplaying the Resistance so thoroughly, Vinen ends up diminishing the importance of the choices the French did indeed face during the war, however much their sheer exhaustion and despair, and the ambient chaos, may have led them to pretend that these choices did not exist.

That these choices did exist, despite all the limiting factors that Vinen explores, is brought home with astonishing force and passion by Carmen Callil in her biography of Louis Darquier, who headed Vichy's General Commission for Jewish Affairs between 1942 and 1944, the period that saw the most Jews deported to the death camps. Her book is a brilliant and frightening tour de force, a triumph of

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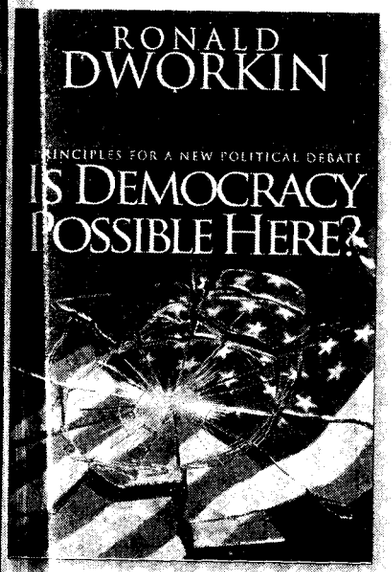

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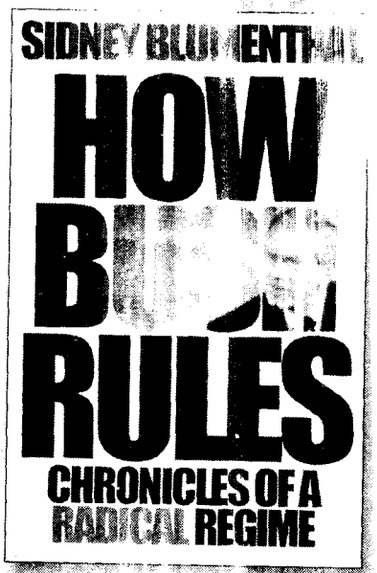

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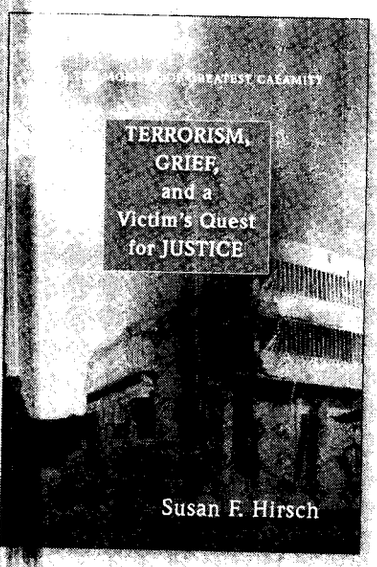

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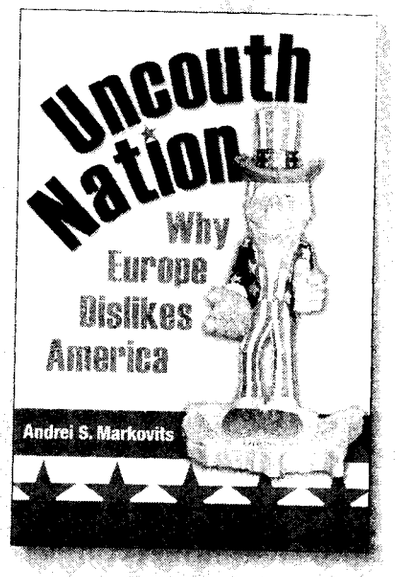

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research and one of the finest portraits of human evil I have ever read. It is not a story of ordinary people by any means. Darquier stood out even from the leaders of Vichy in his rabid anti-Semitism and ideological hatreds. But it shows all too clearly the sort of monsters, French and German, who had so many of France's ordinary people at their mercy during these terrible years.

Darquier's prewar story was mostly one of pathetic failure. He was born in 1897 into comfortable circumstances in the southern French town of Cahors, the son of a prominent doctor and politician. In the army during World War I, he performed well in action but turned disorderly and disobedient (and usually drunk) away from the front. After the war he tried selling advertising, followed by a stint in the wheat business, but proved incapable of holding down a steady job. He was lazy, sloppy, arrogant, pompous, mendacious and frequently intoxicated. He also had a penchant for embezzlement, and only his family's political connections kept him out of jail. Between 1927 and 1934 he lived in a series of cheap hotels (constantly dodging bill collectors), spinning ever more fantastic stories about himself. Appropriating the identity of a more distinguished family, he called himself Darquier de Pellepoix and sometimes passed himself off as a baron. Tall, broad-shouldered and never without a monocle, he at least looked the part.

In the late 1920s he met a mate perfectly suited to him: an Australian chorus girl named Myrtle Jones, who matched him in scrounging ability, outdid him in alcohol consumption and liked to pass herself off as Sandra Lindsay or Lady Sandra Workman-Macnaghten. In 1927 they married—probably bigamously, because there is no record of a divorce from her first husband—and moved to London as Baron and Baroness Darquier de Pellepoix. There, they lived hand-to-mouth in Darquier's familiar style, and in April 1930 he made it into the pages of the *Evening Standard* under the headline "Monocled Baron Charged" (with being a penniless illegal alien). Later that year they had their first and only child, a girl named Anne, and promptly abandoned her into the care of an English nanny paid (irregularly) by their families, scarcely ever to see her again. The couple had frequent drunken rows, during which he beat her ferociously. Yet even though they were sometimes separated, they could not cut their bonds. Soon after Anne's birth, her parents returned to France.

In the early 1930s, as the ideological climate turned extreme, he followed his older and more successful brother into right-wing politics, and in February 1934 had a life-changing stroke of good luck: He got shot. The occasion was the riots of February 6, in which crowds from a variety of far-right organizations attacked the National Assembly and tried to overthrow the weak government of the Third Republic, which much of the population considered unrepresentative of the "real country" and therefore illegitimate (the extreme-right author Robert Brasillach infamously called it "an old syphilitic whore, stinking of patchouli and yeast infection"). Painfully wounded in the thigh, Darquier immediately became a political celebrity. "It's like having a winning ticket in the lottery," he wrote during his recovery, with characteristic cynicism. "I think I'm going to find influential friends now, as I'm a unique example (the others who were severely wounded are cooks, drivers and shop employees). I believe that I'm going to profit from the accident—I've decided to play this card for all it's worth!" True to his word, he started to cultivate leaders of the extreme right, including Pierre-Charles Taittinger, the champagne magnate (think of him next time you have something to celebrate), and to lead an association of February 6 veterans. In 1935 he won election to the Paris City Council and used it as a platform to spout a message of hatred toward democracy, modernity, freemasons and Jews.

Louis Darquier, a failure, a liar and a drunk, shrewdly exploited anti-Semitism to become Vichy's Commissioner of Jewish Affairs.

There is little sign that Darquier gave particular attention to the Jews before the mid-1930s. He was anti-Semitic, of course, but in the reflexive, unthinking way that characterized nearly all right-wing Frenchmen of the day (and a good many on the other side of the political aisle as well). He had cordial relations with individual Jews. But after 1934 a number of hard-line anti-Semites decided he could be a useful spokesman, and prompted him to make the Jews his principal political issue. Darquier eagerly complied. He started to put references to Jewish finance, blood purity and *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* into his speeches. He demanded anti-Jewish legislation and founded anti-Semitic publications. He acquired a dog named Porthos and taught it to attack at the command "Aux Juifs!" All this time, he and Myrtle were continuing to live their drunken, helter-skelter existence. In 1935 his bar tab alone came to some 50,000 francs (roughly $40,000 today). Several times debt almost derailed him.

In the late 1930s, though, Darquier found a new and sinister source of funding: the Nazi government. With its support, he expanded his loose network of clubs and associations, and turned ever more strident and passionate in his denunciations, calling for the expulsion of all Jews who had entered France since 1918. Repeatedly hauled into court on charges of libel, of defamation, of disseminating enemy propaganda and of being an enemy agent (the Nazi subsidies were an open secret), he used each controversy to raise his stature on the extreme right. The day after Hitler invaded Poland, he got into a fistfight in the Brasserie Lipp after loudly denouncing the "Jewish War." Soon afterward, Darquier went back into the French army and was captured, along with millions of others, by the Germans. But the Nazis quietly arranged his release, and by the summer of 1941 the Vichy regime had cleared him of all outstanding legal issues. His moment had arrived.

At first, it was not clear that the new regime created under Pétain's aegis would follow Hitler's line on the Jews. Pétain stood for order, for dignity in defeat, for a "national revolution" that would cleanse the country of the corruption and weakness of the Third Republic, but not necessarily for official anti-Semitism. As Vinen points out, several Jewish deputies to the National Assembly joined that body's infamous vote to award Pétain full powers (which gave Vichy the status of the Republic's legitimate successor). Among Vichy's most enthusiastic initial supporters, there were far more Catholic conservatives than fascists, who remained a tiny minority of the population.

Yet as the regime began to consolidate, extremists like Darquier wriggled out into the open, and both they and the Germans began to push for French counterparts to the Nazis' Nuremberg Laws. The regime willingly obliged. Starting in October 1940, it issued two "Statutes on the Jews," which went further than even the Nazis requested, banning Jews from teaching, journalism, film, theater, the officer corps and civil service, most professions and finance. Foreign Jews were interned, and in the summer of 1941, 250,000 Parisians visited an

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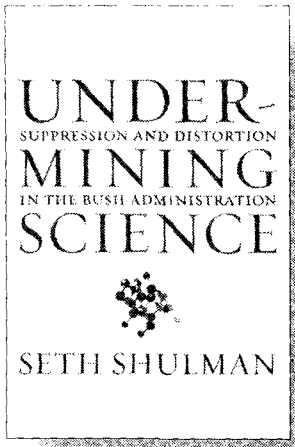

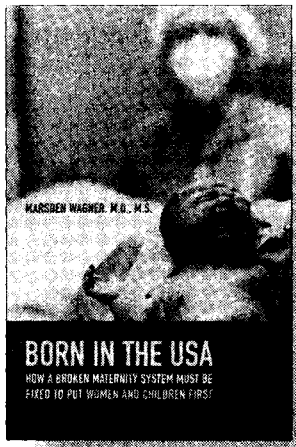

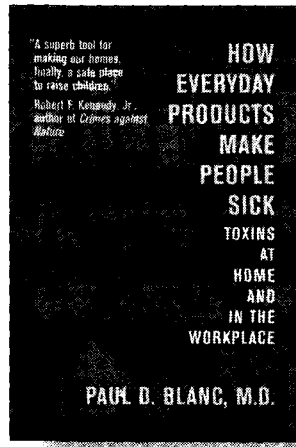
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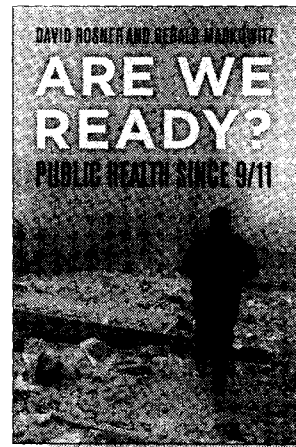

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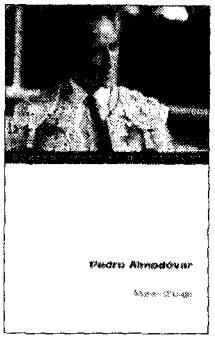

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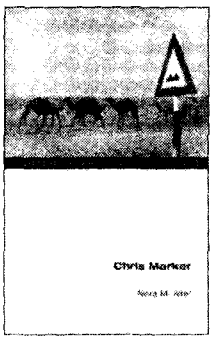

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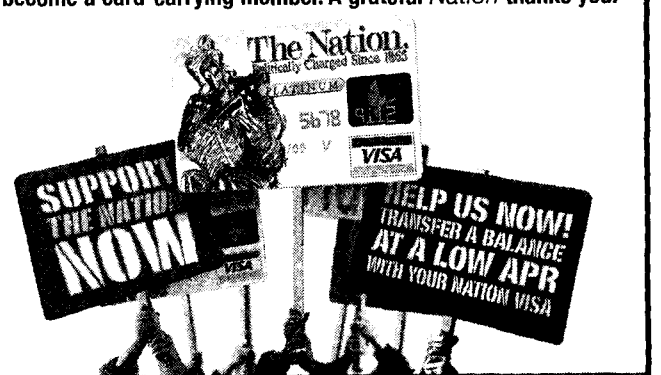

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anti-Semitic exhibition titled "The Jew and France." Vichy set up its General Commission for Jewish Affairs.

Into this madhouse, in March 1942, came Louis Darquier, to replace the conservative Catholic Xavier Vallat, whom the Nazis and their French soulmates considered too soft. Darquier immediately began to abuse the office, siphoning off funds, sexually exploiting secretaries and trying to use the commission's investigative unit as his own private police force. But he was right at home. Typical of the commission's personnel were Jean Bouvyer, a thug from the prewar right-wing terrorist group the Cagoule who tracked down Jews in hiding, and Georges Montandon, a reputable anthropologist who inspected men and women for physical signs of Jewishness and took large bribes to issue "Certificates of Non-Belonging to the Jewish Race." Darquier himself developed a profitable sideline issuing the same certificates, and amassed a small fortune from this and other corrupt practices. His laziness was legendary; the only significant policy he actually formulated and implemented himself was to oblige all Jews in the occupied zone to wear the yellow Star of David.

But by the time Darquier took office, the Final Solution had begun in earnest, and the Germans had serious plans for his commission. Adolf Eichmann demanded that Vichy deport 100,000 Jews to the death camps and, through his French subordinates, put pressure on Vichy to make the arrangements. Darquier found himself in the unfamiliar and unwelcome position of having to take responsibility, along with the police official René Bousquet, who actually organized the deportations. The Germans, believing exaggerated propaganda, thought that the Jewish population in France numbered 865,000. In reality there were only 330,000, and fewer than 100,000 of the non-French refugees whom Vichy hoped to expel first, so the French found it hard to comply with Eichmann's directives.

There followed the sort of bureaucratic chaos and confusion described by Vinen, as the French and the Germans bickered and bargained over numbers, but it had gruesome results. In July 1942, the French police—acting on the authority of the French state, not the Germans—arrested nearly 13,000 Jews in Paris, including more than 4,000 children, and shut them up for days in stifling heat in an indoor bicycle racetrack (the Vélodrome d'Hiver, or Vel' d'Hiv') without water or proper sanitation. The final destination was Auschwitz. Thousands were gassed on arrival, and hardly any survived. Many more arrests and deportations followed. As a result of macabre bureaucratic logic, young children initially exempted were sent to their death later on, when the rules changed. Children born in France, and therefore possessing French citizenship, were separated from their parents. Darquier's chief of staff, Pierre Galien (a Nazi agent), asked to intervene on behalf of a 10-month-old child left parentless by the deportations, replied: "It's a Jew child, let it die." Vinen tells the moving story of a brother and sister, 14 and 10 years old, left to fend for themselves after their parents' disappearance (their landlord coldly insisted that they continue to pay the full rent on their apartment).

Nonetheless, by March 1943 the French had met less than half of Eichmann's target; the Germans were furious with them, and with Darquier in particular. "The result of Darquier de Pellepoix's activity over his past year in office," a German memo concluded, "is nil in all areas." Darquier was continuing to make speeches, to preside over his various clubs and associations and to embezzle money meant for anti-Semitic propaganda efforts, all the while complaining about his workload. He and Myrtle

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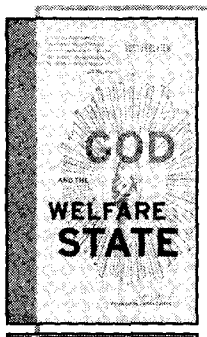
(who remained in Paris with him throughout the war, although technically an enemy alien) remained as disorderly as ever in their private lives, although now in the more luxurious confines of the Hôtel Bristol (as Callil acidly remarks, Darquier was one of very few Frenchmen to gain weight during the war). The Germans tried to dismiss him, but he saved himself for a time by helping to broker the theft and sale of a large private Jewish art collection (in the northern zone alone, Vichy stole more than a billion francs in Jewish property, along with 100,000 artworks, 40,000 of which were never recovered).

Darquier finally lost his job in early 1944, but he remained in France until after D-Day. And then, as the Allied armies approached Paris, he and a French mistress escaped south, walking across the Pyrenees into Spain. The Franco regime welcomed him (along with many other French exiles), gave him an apartment, found him jobs teaching French and translating, and protected him even as a postwar French court condemned him to death in absentia. Later French governments made no serious efforts to uncover his whereabouts, let alone extradite him, and so, like many other prominent French (and German) officials, he paid no price for his wartime activities. He had another daughter by his mistress, but was eventually reunited with Myrtle. In 1978 a journalist from *L'Express* tracked him down and surreptitiously recorded an interview in which Darquier angrily defended his wartime record, spouted familiar anti-Semitic diatribes and declared that the only thing gassed in Auschwitz was lice. The interview caused a scandal in France and eventually led to the indictment of Bousquet, who had gone on to a brilliant career in business (thanks partly to the protection of François Mitterrand, himself a former extremist and supporter of Pétain who switched sides at a convenient moment). Darquier finally died in August 1980, near Málaga.

While Darquier was hardly an unknown figure, Callil has done a Herculean job of research to give a far closer, richer portrait of his life than we have for almost any figure of his era. Her bibliography lists nearly 100 separate archives in seven countries, more than 100 interviews and countless letters given to her by individuals, including members of the Darquier family in France. *Bad Faith* is long, and detailed, but in this case the details reveal the devil.

Callil is not a professional historian (she is the founder of Britain's Virago Press), and her motivation for pursuing Darquier's story was anything but academic. In the first pages, she explains that soon after she came from Australia to Britain in the early 1960s, she attempted to commit suicide. When she recovered, her doctor prescribed therapy, and for seven years Callil went three times a week to see a half-Australian psychiatrist. She was Anne Darquier, the abandoned daughter of Louis and Myrtle who had been raised in Oxfordshire by her redoubtable nanny, Elsie Lightfoot. Anne died in 1970 at the age of 40, poisoned by alcohol and pills. ("It was not suicide," Callil writes, "though there are slow ways of trying to kill yourself not given that label.") Callil, who was deeply affected by Anne's death, learned of the elder Darquier's identity only later, when she spotted him in Marcel Ophüls's documentary *The Sorrow and the Pity*.

Callil's book, then, is the result of what can only be called an obsessive quest to understand: to understand the unhappy Anne Darquier by understanding the bizarre and terrible legacy that she had the impossible task of living with. While principally a biography of Darquier himself, it is also the story of the entire



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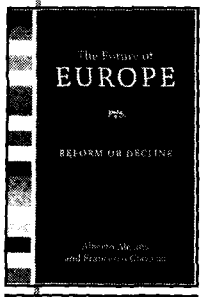

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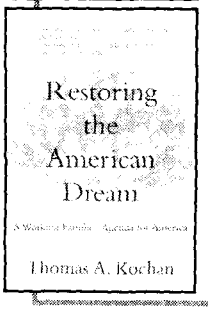

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Only I knew it was full of
candlewick bedspreads,
orange pekoe tea leaves
smoking chimneys over wet peat;

that steam rose there from
sweet winter herbs and pearl
onions and marrow bones
boiling all one afternoon
on the oven top in a stock pot,

and if I add the bolt of silk
you once brought home and
rolled out on a table, showing
the gloomy colour pewter becomes
by candlelight, it is because

the secret histories of things
deserve to linger, to belong again
to the coil of your hair I found once
as a child, dried out by shadows,
in a shut-tight wooden box

in which was a mirror with
an ornate handle, an enameled back,
the original mercury amalgam
blemishing the glass from which
your face disappeared years ago.

Eavan Boland

family, with long, fascinating pages on Myrtle and her Australian family, and also on the story of how a hard-edged ambition took Anne Darquier from genteel poverty with Lightfoot to university at Oxford, and then into medicine. Anne, who during the war had idealized the father she had never met (and whom she had very little idea of), finally met him after he arrived in Spain, and the experience left her utterly appalled and distraught. Just before her death she remarked to Callil that "there are some things and some people you can never forgive." Incidentally, Darquier inherited £16,552 from his daughter and used it to purchase his apartment in Madrid from the Spanish government. As one of Myrtle's pallbearers remarked (she had died soon before Anne): "No one, it seems, survives Darquier."

Callil writes with passion (how could she not, under these circumstances?), and it gives her book a force and drive that keeps the reader going through its 400-some pages of narrative. Occasionally she overwrites: "The threnody of [Myrtle's] Tasmanian family and the money she would one day inherit trills through all her letters like the sound of a piccolo." More often, however, she holds back, giving her prose touches of dry, penetrating wit. For instance: The existence of the unoccupied zone gave France "a sedative pretence of sovereignty." Or, on Darquier's appointment to head the commission: "An even worse punishment for the Germans responsible for his appointment was their discovery that Darquier was a pestiferous bore." Or, on Louis and Myrtle: "Their mutual inventions were one of the strongest cords that held them together." Callil also has an unfortunate line, in her postscript, about what "the Jews of Israel [are] passing on to the Palestinian people." It has caused a predictable controversy, and is wrongheaded. Since when does a great crime confer any special moral burden on the *victims*?

But what of the question of Louis Darquier's own moral responsibility? Here, Callil poses more genuinely troubling, and difficult questions, and the problem of identification rears its head. On the one hand, by telling the story in the way she has, Callil inevitably relates Darquier's monstrosity in his private life to the monstrosity of his public actions. Callil knows, of course, that most monsters injure no one other than their nearest and dearest, while many great criminals lead impeccable private lives. But she draws a connection nonetheless by characterizing Darquier, in the end, as a sort of wanton incompetent whom chance and tragedy swept up into a position where he could do harm on a bizarrely vast scale:

> Yoked in mutual self-deception with Myrtle, the Baron and Baroness, twin children—wicked children—played games, murderous games, pulling wings off butterflies, dispensing cruelty like liquorice water. Left to himself, Louis Darquier would have destroyed only his own children and any adult...foolish enough to dabble in his fantasy world.... Above and around Darquier were the real criminals, the Pétains and Weygands, the Bousquets and Vallats, the cardinals and clergy, the judges and lawyers, the industrialists and businessmen...who put his babbling mouth to work for their own ends.... Looking at him, hearing him speak...they stared their own inhumanity in the face.... He was ridiculous, he was their fall guy, but he was also the dark essence of *l'Etat français*.

There is something about this judgment that is just a little too easy, and this may perhaps have to do with the many years Callil spent inside Louis Darquier's head. It is not that she sympathizes with him in any way. Darquier was a man almost impossible not to loathe, and Callil loathes him fiercely. But she may have gotten to know him too well to take him as seriously as he deserves. Darquier was indeed a wicked child of sorts—indeed, a certifiable maniac. But World War II was a time when the maniacs emerged from the asylum and nearly destroyed civilization. What was Hitler, after all, if not a more efficient, a more energetic, a more ambitious Darquier? The more sober men of Vichy—the Pétains and Lavals and Bousquets—were indeed criminals. They exploited their country's defeat for their own ideological and personal ends. But left to themselves they would never have devised the idea of sending tens of thousands of innocent men, women and children to their death for the sin of being born Jewish. That insanity came from the Darquiers. It is relatively easy to imagine being a classic collabo like Bousquet, who doubtless defended his actions to himself better than Darquier could ever be bothered to. Putting oneself in Darquier's shoes is much harder, precisely because of the extent of his mania. Even Callil, understandably, flinches from the task in revulsion. Nonetheless, thanks to her, we now have a portrait of his evil that remains scorched in the brain long after the book has been closed. ■

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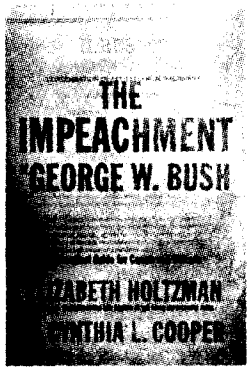

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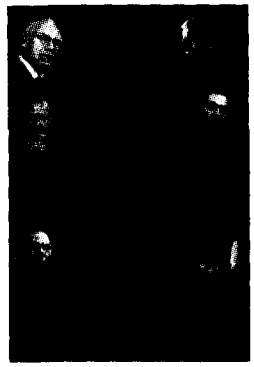

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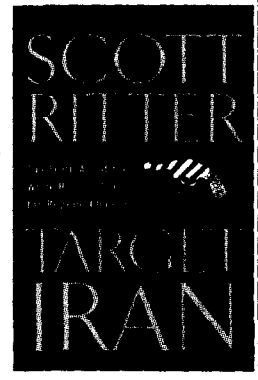

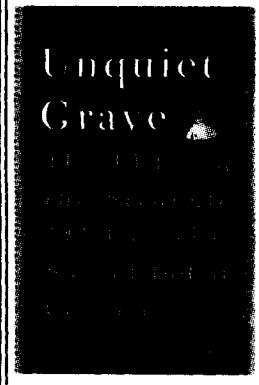

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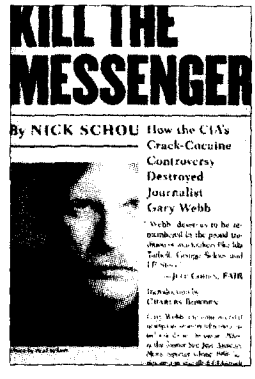

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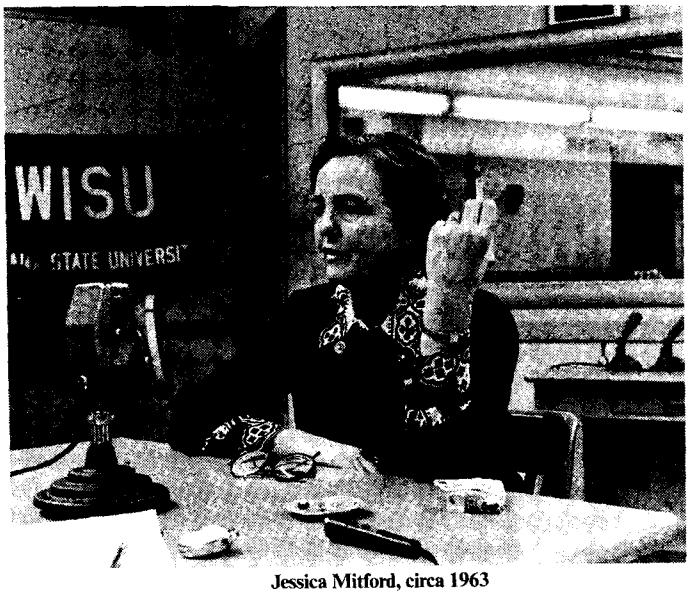
Class Consciousness

CHARLES TAYLOR

DECCA: The Letters of Jessica Mitford.
Edited by Peter Y. Sussman. Knopf. 744 pp. $35.

I once heard a novelist tell a story about a fellow he knew in college (this would have been in the early 1970s) who openly admitted that his parents were Communists. Asked what this meant in the course of their daily lives, the young man answered, without a trace of irony, "It means that when we sit down to dinner the maid eats with us."

In the 1989 introduction to the reissue of her 1960 memoir *Hons and Rebels*, Jessica Mitford recalls this of its composition: "I was staying with my mother at Inch Kenneth, her remote Hebridean island, in the summer of 1959." There are no figures on how many authors of memoirs about their Communist political awakening had mothers who owned remote islands, Hebridean or otherwise—but probably not many. We shouldn't forget that Mitford's first plan was to donate her share of the island to the British Communist Party, nor that for many years she and her second husband, the lawyer Robert Treuhaft, lived in ordinary middle-class comfort in Oakland, California. Nor should we fall for the dreary, doctrinaire notion that the moneyed and privileged are inherently incapable of having a social conscience. (How many protests, strikes and candidacies have been rescued by infusions of cash from the simpatico rich?)



COURTESY OF THE MITFORD FAMILY

Jessica Mitford, circa 1963

But can we also admit that Mitford's sense of her position lacks a certain irony? Had the maid been invited to join the family for a meal during Mitford's upper-class English upbringing, you get the feeling Mitford would have seen it not as a nod in the direction of the classless society but, to borrow one of her favorite adjectives, as the most *extraorder* thing.

The communications that make up the new doorstop *Decca: The Letters of Jessica Mitford*, as well as Mitford's two-volume autobiography, *Hons and Rebels* and *A Fine Old Conflict* (1977), seem to exist in a double bubble of privilege and ideology. Mitford's account of her and her siblings' upbringing—the girls were taught to read but, educationally, were otherwise on their own; their mother was close to a caricature of the oblivious society matron; their father was every bit the tyrant that Mitford's sister Nancy captured in her novel *The Pursuit of Love*—suggests the Glass family as rewritten by P.G. Wodehouse. Unfortunately, the latter's sense of absurdity is outweighed by what Mary McCarthy described as the closed-circuit mentality of the former. With their secret languages and endless nicknames (Muv, Farve, Boud, Hen) with endless variations, the Mitfords come off as the privileged center of one of those closed circuits. A family friend once said to Mitford, "It has always seemed to me that your family regards the rest of the world, and everything that happens in it, as a huge joke put on for their benefit."

There is evidence in *Decca* of the benefit Mitford brought others with the bombshell impact of her 1963 exposé of the funeral industry, *The American Way of Death*. In a 1964 letter to Treuhaft, Mitford writes of a message she received from Bobby Kennedy, who had been charged with picking out a coffin for his murdered brother. Offered a choice between one for $900 and one for $2,000, RFK chose the former, telling Mitford that had he not read her book he would have felt obligated to get the more expensive choice as the last gesture he could make for his brother. You read that and know that if Mitford's muckraking was able to reach Bobby Kennedy in his awful circumstance, she must have done the same for people who were less in shock and had considerably fewer resources than the Kennedys.

But that judgment of the detached, superior Mitford sense of amusement is dead on. When you read through *Decca* and the two autobiographies, it's impossible to ignore that Mitford's detachment functioned as both naïveté and snobbishness.

Rebel she may have fancied herself, but she kept an aristocrat's sense of the wrong and right kind of people. "Offhand," she writes in a 1959 letter, "I don't agree with the starting point of your criticisms (that one can't generalize about classes of people—I've always thought one could; the Dutch, for instance, are as depressingly clean as one is always told they are; the Southern French, as warmly filthy; Southern U.S., faintly squalid etc. etc. and the Petit Bourgeoisie, as Lenin so truly said, vacillating)." So much for *those* people. This sort of thing rears its head in *Decca* with dependable regularity. A guest at the home of her friends Virginia and Clifford Durr is described as "a French man of the greasy type." At least there is the consolation that the house is run by "large, competent Blacks." When Virginia Durr takes Mitford to the 1940 Democratic Convention, she describes a meeting of the Resolutions Committee: "More or less anyone can speak before it & there were a number of rather boring ones about insurance companies, & the status of Indians etc." And this is not the only bit of dismissiveness to roll off Mitford's silver-forked tongue.

A January 1941 letter brings a reference to a friend of the Durrs, "rather a dull girl called Ladybird Johnson," reflecting a lifetime of disdain for the Johnsons in particular and for white Southerners in general. A 1959 letter declares that you can tell that Germans, like Southerners, are bad by "the backs of their necks (which were classic: huge, red and beefy)." A 1965 letter to Virginia Durr recalls "the days when [LBJ] and Ladybird used to slop around your garden with their outlandish manners and accents"—and that to a Southern friend. The view down Mitford's nose does not

Charles Taylor is a columnist for the Newark Star-Ledger *and a contributor to the* New York Observer, *the* New York Times, Newsday *and other publications.*

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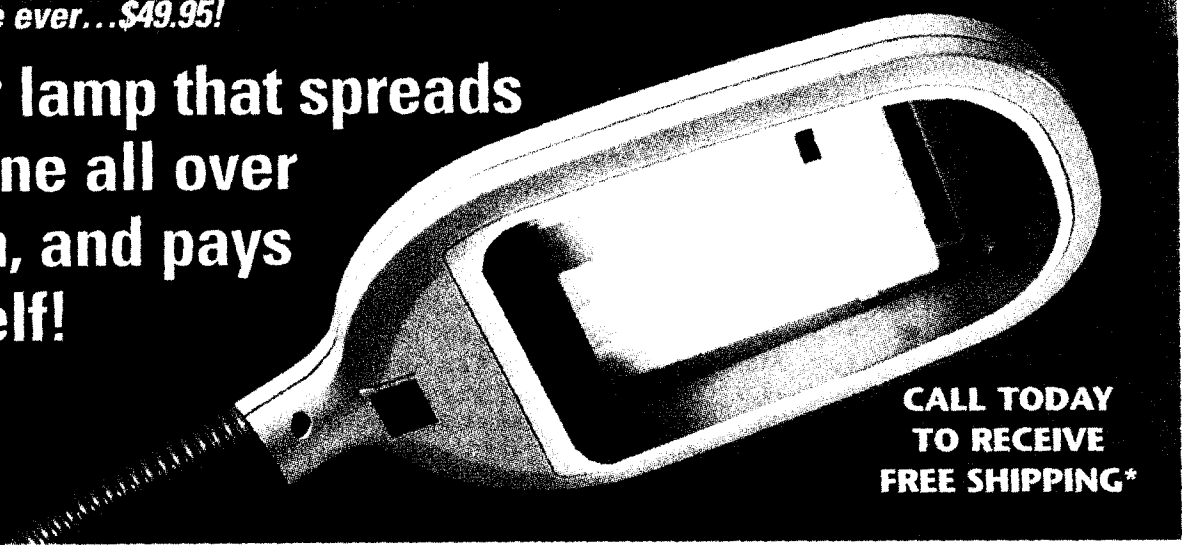

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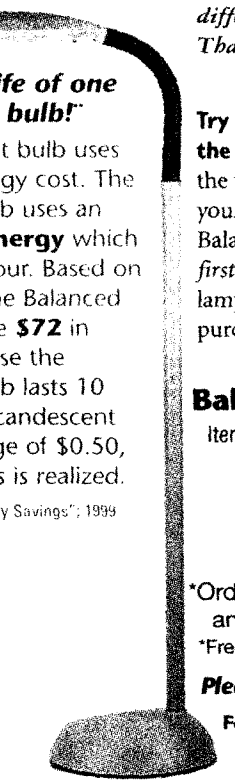

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allow for an acknowledgment of the Civil Rights Act or the Voting Rights Act, nor for an inkling of why Ralph Ellison called LBJ "the greatest American President for the poor and for Negroes."

But that acknowledgment would have required more nuance than an either/or thinker like Mitford was capable of. It also would have impinged on Mitford's fantasy of the role she and her fellow Communists played in the civil rights saga. This is not to deny her any part. As a member of the American Communist Party, Mitford worked for an East Bay group called the Civil Rights Congress. The group monitored police brutality cases in Oakland, used white members to front for blacks buying homes in white neighborhoods and was involved with local and national cases, particularly the case of a local man, Jerry Newson, who had been framed for murder. But throughout *A Fine Old Conflict* and in *Decca*, Mitford clings to the notion that the Communists were the only people fighting for civil rights. "Isn't it an extraordinary advance from a few short years ago," she writes of the student civil rights movement, "when nobody would lift a finger except us reds?" Even if that were true—and it requires editor Peter Sussman's dismissing the efforts of both the NAACP and the ACLU to assert it—it deprives blacks of any agency on their own behalf. Of course, you can note the influence and contribution of people like Stanley Levinson—and the way J. Edgar Hoover used Levinson's presence in the movement to discredit Martin Luther King Jr.—and the inevitable intersections that occurred between the CPUSA and people working for civil rights. But to conclude that "nobody would lift a finger except us reds" is fantasy. It ignores, for instance, A. Philip Randolph and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. And it requires Sussman's seconding of Robert Treuhaft's ridiculous implication that the middle-class NAACP didn't concern itself with poorer blacks, and trivializing its accomplishments as "some notable successes" in overturning discriminating laws. *Brown v. Board of Education*, anyone? Are we to seriously believe only the black middle-class was affected by that ruling?

It's been said, not very convincingly, that Mitford's Communism was an act of rebellion against her family's privilege, and specifically against the fascism embraced by her sisters Unity (who put a bullet in her head when England declared war on Germany, botched the act and lingered on until 1948) and Diana (who married the British fascist leader Oswald Mosley and was, with him, imprisoned briefly in England during World War II). It's clear Mitford took no pleasure in her lifelong estrangement from Diana (through their sister Deborah, the Duchess of Devonshire, she sent a message of condolence on Mosley's death), and again and again she expresses pain over Unity's self-inflicted incapacitation. Of course Mitford was reacting against her family's embrace of fascism, but to assume that's all she was doing, to assume the development of anyone's political consciousness is simply an act of rebellion, seems a juvenile reduction of political awareness to shopworn Freudianism.

It has also been said, more convincingly than Mitford allowed, that her Communism was the other side of the coin of her sisters' fascism. She wasn't a nutter, like those two sisters. But she did share something of their blind faith. Caroline Blackwood wrote of a 1980s interview with Diana (Lady Mosley), "She was so beguiling that she made one forget that she had spent her life yearning for a Europe united by a repressive Fascist leadership." The breezy casualness of *Decca* and the autobiographies invites you to overlook that Mitford spent much of her life excusing and falsifying the repressiveness of the ideology she espoused.

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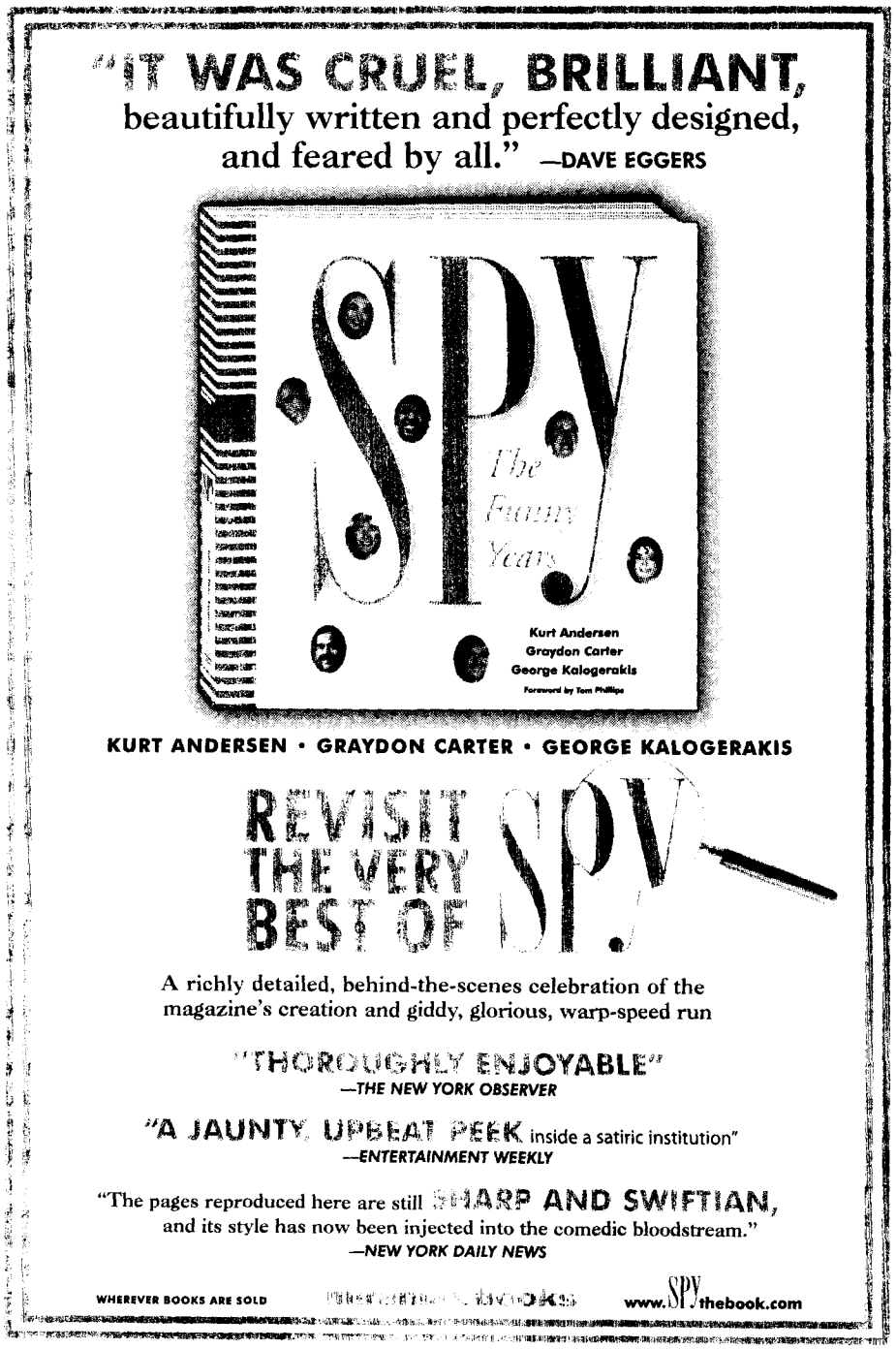
Sussman quotes Treuhaft as saying, "When Decca makes up her mind, she *never* changes it." They find this admirable. Both *Hons and Rebels* and *A Fine Old Conflict* were written about twenty years after the events they describe. And in both Mitford clings to what history has proved nonsense. Just as in her view Communists were the only ones to stand up for civil rights, so they were the only ones to fight fascism. Apparently neither *Homage to Catalonia* nor the Hitler-Stalin pact penetrated her consciousness. In 1960 Mitford is *still* approvingly quoting her first husband, Esmond Romilly, as saying that Winston Churchill (his uncle) was interested in fighting Germany and Italy only because of the threat they posed to British imperialism. Even forty-six years ago, who was damn fool enough to think that the British Communist Party did more than Churchill to fight fascism? Which is not to deny the role Communists played in the history of opposition to fascism. But to paint Communism as the sole opponent is another of Mitford's self-aggrandizing delusions.

Most devastatingly for Mitford's reputation, *Decca* appeared in the same month as the fiftieth anniversary of the Hungarian uprising against the Soviets, an event on which she was unwaveringly appalling. In *A Fine Old Conflict* Mitford recounts a 1955 trip she and Treuhaft took to Hungary, where they puzzle over a waiter asking them to smuggle out a letter to his brother in America. "But why?" wonder these red Candides. "Is there some problem about mailing letters out?" And, good soldiers that they are, they decide the waiter is probably a counterrevolutionary spy and decline. Mitford nevertheless records the incident in a piece she writes for *People's World* (surprise! it's cut). A year after the trip, and a few weeks after the Soviets crush the Hungarian uprising, Mitford writes to her mother-in-law expressing support for the invasion—which even the CPUSA had condemned. "I fear that the bloodshed and disruption would have been far worse if [Soviet troops] hadn't come in" and "I think they *had no alternative* [emphasis added] but to try and restore order and to preserve a socialist system in Hungary against what looks like a fascist coup."

Twenty-one years later, in *A Fine Old Conflict*, after it was known that thousands were killed in Budapest and elsewhere in Hungary by the Soviets, after the Hungarian invasion inspired mass defections from Western Communist parties, Mitford is *still* taking this same line. Only this time, miraculously, she's able to summon support from friends of her mother-in-law, Holocaust survivors and anti-Communists who welcomed the Soviets because they prevented a return to an anti-Semitic fascist state. Sure, there were "legitimate grievances against Stalinist repression," but they were being manipulated by the CIA and by counterrevolutionaries. As for the Hungarians the State Department brought into the United States? Obviously, "grasping neo-Fascist types." But even if some were, what about the jubilant faces of the gun-bearing rebels we see in the photo on the cover of Michael Korda's new memoir, *Journey to a Revolution*, radiating, as Greil Marcus wrote of the young Parisians of May 1968, "joy in discovering for what drama one's setting is the setting"? What of the thousands of Hungarians who fled the country? Were they all neo-Fascists? What about the Czechs twelve years later? Or the Eastern Europeans twenty-one years after that? Of them, there is not a word to be found in *Decca*. Nor is there any mention of the Hungarian dead except by implication in Mitford's claim that what she so Decca-delicately calls the "intervention" prevented further bloodshed. *Twelve Days*, Victor Sebestyen's new history of the uprising, recounts this joke going around Hungary in the fall of '56: "The Russians say they have come as our friends. Imagine if they said they were our enemies."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It was not Hungary that caused Mitford to leave the party, nor Khrushchev's revelations earlier in 1956 about Stalin's crimes. It was, as Sussman writes approvingly, "not primarily over some issue of high principle but because it had become dull... boring. Rather like London's debutante circuit."

And that, as well as anything, sums up the sense of entitlement, the "dedicated alienation from truth," in Robert Warshow's phrase, that is the essence of Mitford's political consciousness. It is not to ignore or excuse the hounding both she and Treuhaft suffered at the hands of HUAC thugs—they were spied upon, had their passports confiscated, were driven from jobs. Mitford's wryness about that, the way she treats those spying on her as ludicrous, is for the most part admirably lacking in self-pity. (She regards the funeral industry representatives she debates with the same withering amusement, an attitude that, as much as the facts she had to hand, probably rallied the public to her side.)

And no one should discount the terrible losses Mitford suffered: two children, an infant girl born to her and Romilly, and later her and Treuhaft's 10-year-old son, Nicholas, who was killed by a bus. In World War II she lost not only Romilly but her brother Tom and, in a sense, most of her family. She was understandably estranged from Unity and Diana, and after running away with Romilly she never saw her father again. There's no doubt that she suffered for sticking to her principles.

But if, as Sussman quotes Mitford as saying, "The whole point of letters is to reveal the writer & her various opinions & let the chips fall where they may," then *Decca* has to be judged on those principles—not by Mitford's tenacity in sticking to them but by what she chose to ignore by doing so. And it's not just the quality (or lack) of thought that is trivializing here; it's the language, the twee tone ("Darling Dinkydonk") that feels as much like heavy lifting as the forced heartiness does (Mitford never laughs; she roars). It's the vision of culture as entirely utilitarian, subservient to the struggle (Paul Robeson's performance as Othello is about the only cultural reference here, apart from confessions of a fondness for pop songs and an admiration for *Lolita*). It's not the length of *Decca* that's exhausting; it's that voice, affecting lightness and straining for political dedication, and failing miserably on both counts. "I don't strive for 'substance, depth & scope' as you put it," Mitford writes to one correspondent. Here's the proof. ■

The Man Who Loved Children

SUZY HANSEN

THROUGH THE CHILDREN'S GATE: A Home in New York.
By Adam Gopnik. Knopf. 318. $25.

New Yorkers may never forgive Adam Gopnik for writing, days after September 11, that the haze drifting north from Ground Zero smelled like an Italian delicacy. The essay, "The City and the Pillars," appeared in *The New Yorker*, where Gopnik has been a staff writer for many years. Devastated readers likely had looked to this literary security blanket to make sense of their personal apocalypse. Charged with this weighty task, Gopnik broke the news in high tones that Uptown, where he lived, was coping with the attacks more elegantly than Downtown.

"The smell, which fills the empty streets of SoHo from Houston to Canal," he wrote, "blew uptown on Wednesday night and is not entirely horrible from a reasonable distance—almost like the smell of smoked mozzarella, a smell of the bubble time." Gopnik was curiously reminded of prosperity and boom times, of cheese, by the odor of violent death. "Gopnik has a skill for shrinking everything in the universe to the scale of a bourgeois amenity," Leon Wieseltier, not a New Yorker, wrote in *The New Republic*.

During those awful days, it was easy to be outraged. Though when Michael Brick of the *New York Times* wrote recently that the peculiar 9/11 smell was of "Coke cans and hair on fire," one felt a similar repugnance, and not because a smoking pyre can't smell ordinary. The valiant literary struggle to say something new, the locked-in-the-study desire to experiment with *language*, in both cases came off as transparent and self-indulgent. You got the feeling that the writers spent a suspicious amount of time digging around in their brains. Gopnik's blithe cold truths, born perhaps of emotional repression rather than emotional honesty, didn't, and often don't, ring true.

The effect is unsettling when you're reading about one of the richest subjects a writer has the privilege of exploring: New York. It's a place of endless yield. And yet in his new book, *Through the Children's Gate: A Home in New York*, Gopnik meditates on a variety of well-harvested local topics: takeout menus, autumn, English speakers, taxi hailers, cooking, Times Square, Central Park and neighbors who complain about noise. "Everyone has a noise dispute story," he writes in "First Thanksgiving: Densities." Indeed. The book's opening essay, another disquisition on "several New York truths," begins, astoundingly, with a map. "To make a home in New York, we first have to find a place on the map of the city to make it in," he writes, and never has New York, so pedantically mistaken for a piece of paper, felt so far away, so cruelly stripped of its spirit.

Gopnik's central preoccupation in this book is the challenge, particularly after 9/11, of raising children in the city. ("The Children's Gate" refers to the gates in Central Park.) In 2000 he and his wife, Martha, and their young children, Luke and Olivia, had returned from Paris, the subject of his previous memoir, *Paris to the Moon*, to find that "the city had been repopulated—some would say overrun—with children." In the new, safe New York, kids on scooters and sneaker wheels, babies cosseted by hulking buggies and designer papooses in primary colors, rule the sidewalks. You can't swing a cigarette without inviting the ire of a Mama Bear, who simultaneously manages to protect her cub and sneer at your sad habit.

This possibility of generational conflict in *Through the Children's Gate* inspires an anticipatory glee, even as the idea of "children and the city" forebodes a startling absence of sex. "Your children make their own maps, which enlarge and improve your own," Gopnik instructs, proving who'll be wearing the pants in this book. Gopnik and his wife do their best to make love in the afternoon; more than once, he takes note of how worn-out all the Upper East Side moms are looking these days: "Clothes, bags, shoes, all of that Capote and Dawn Powell stuff seems to have vanished from them." Gopnik has come home from Paris not only to parenthood but to reality.

In one of the most colorful essays, "Man Goes to See a Doctor," Gopnik's eulogy for youth is embedded in his eulogy for his psychoanalyst. "The point of analysis was,

Suzy Hansen is an editor at the New York Observer.

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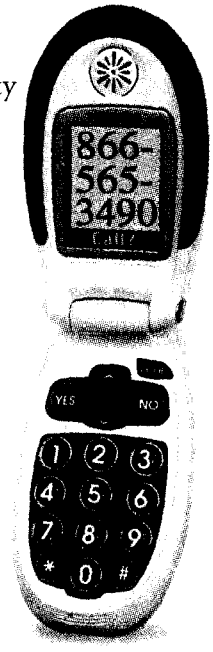

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I see now, to prepare me for fatherhood by supplying a patriarchal model," he writes. Though his problems admittedly include "nothing interesting," his shrink, a wise German émigré named Dr. Grosskurth, is blissfully anything but boring. Their gossipy sessions ranged from Gopnik's tribulations to those of Norman Mailer and Woody Allen, and even *The New York Review of Books*.

Like most writers, Gopnik is at his best when he has a fresh and specific subject at his disposal. His rambling thoughts on parenthood or exercise or "slowness" give him too much freedom to spin air-filled sentences on the obvious and overly generalized; in his essay about Times Square, "Times Regained," for example, he lazily calls anything that's not a chain store a "weird store." (Art gallery? Weird store.) His semi-reported pieces, however, particularly those focusing on Olivia's trials, result in genuine feeling and smart detail. She's the star of The Gopnik Show.

For the first half of the book, silent Olivia wisely observes life from the Gopniks' apartment window. When she finally speaks, it's in "Bumping Into Mr. Ravioli," perhaps the best piece in the book, not because it's cute—but because it's not cute. "Bumping Into Mr. Ravioli" introduces the 3-year-old's imaginary friend. She calls him, with what sounds like the toughness of a Brooklyn Mafia don, simply Ravioli. You can't help but imagine her all gesticulations and Marlon Brando frowns. "We had coffee, but then he had to run," she says of Ravioli. "He canceled lunch. Again."

Olivia's imaginary playmate is too busy to play with her. And he's a critic. "Ravioli read your book," she says to her father. "He didn't like it much." And then, as if nothing could seem more New York than that, Gopnik unveils the Second Fake Friend: "'Laurie, tell Ravioli I'm calling,' I heard Olivia say. I pressed her about who, exactly, Laurie was. Olivia shook her head. 'She works for Ravioli,' she said."

All of this lovely comedy leads to some of Gopnik's smartest analysis about the miseries of modern urban life and why his small daughter might have dreamed up a Type-A Italian heartbreaker and his secretary as her closest compatriots. "We exit the apartment into a still-dense nineteenth-century grid of street corners and restaurants full of people," he writes of New York's oppressive confluence of the Old World and the hypermodern, "and come home to the late-twentieth-century grid of faxes and e-mails and overwhelming incompleteness." Gopnik, rendered helpless by his child's cynicism, flashes some of his own soul. "We build rhetorical baffles around our lives to keep the crowding out, only to find that we have let nobody we love in."

Too often, though, the writer forgoes both humor and insight for a self-satisfaction he can't shake. In "First Thanksgiving: Densities," he and his wife and other parents at Luke's school conspire to make their kids fly in a production of *Peter Pan*. (Gopnik describes the school, which he calls "Artists & Anglers," this way: "Each class seems beautifully devised—a core of creative people's children, a sample of richer children, a frosting of minorities," giving the reader some idea of what paradise looks like to Condé Nast writers.) This entire charade—the parents' meetings, the physics of flying children—portends ludicrousness. Gopnik, instead, earnestly locates what's sweet about it. "The willingness of New York parents is bracing compared with the aloofness of French parents, or even of earlier generations of American parents. *They will do anything to make their children fly*," he writes, italics his, and he's serious.

Later, after much child-flight deliberation, a mischievous parent breaks the mold: "Why don't we just push them off a high place? They might fly." Readers of *Through the Children's Gate* will clap their hands at this shot of irreverence—Whee! Normal parental exasperation and human wickedness! Gopnik then dumps water on their heads: "The smile that went around the room was not a mordant one of knowledge," Gopnik writes, "but a happy one of promise: *Our* kids just might."

The kids, by the way, don't actually fly—or, in other words, feel any sort of rush of freedom. They only *appear* to fly for the benefit of their parents sitting in the audience. "But to us, the house in *Peter Pan* looks like an unobtainable idyll of domestic pleasure, a place to fly *to*," Gopnik writes in a typical paean to real estate.

Throughout the book, Gopnik weighs in on New York's over-gentrified, Victoria Secreted evolution, and on New Yorkers' collective nostalgia for the city's grunge years. New York is overrun with children, he writes, but that's not the real problem after all. Children like Olivia, ultimately, make better conversationalists than any you'll find in Williamsburg, anyway. When a man curses loudly, screaming the F-word, she says to her father, "Daddy, aren't you glad to be back in Yew Nork?" and you want to buy Olivia a beer.

The problem with present-day New York à la Gopnik is that it's overrun with smug New York parents. Members of this very special class feel as far from real life as Gopnik's map does from the actual streets of the city. Liberal, creative, "precariously" wealthy moms and dads bury themselves in the manageable problems of private school, the rewards of family-sized apartments and the terrifying task of protecting two small citizens against a metropolis of threats both justifiable and justifiably imaginary. Once upon a time these New Yorkers went through those gates to that Central Park playground, and were forever lost to the city. ■

God's Willing Executioners

DANIEL LAZARE

GOD'S WAR: A New History of the Crusades.
By Christopher Tyerman. Harvard. 1,024 pp. $35.

There are many ways to describe Pope Benedict XVI's remarks at the University of Regensburg last September concerning the "evil and inhuman" nature of Muhammad's teachings. Impolitic is one way, maladroit another. They can also be described as deeply ignorant concerning Islam's role in preserving, transmitting and enhancing classical culture at a time when most Europeans were still snuggling up to their oxen for warmth. But the most striking thing about the comments was the way they reflected a view that was alarmingly one-sided and unreflective. The religious zeal of the proto-Muslim forces that erupted out of Arabia in the seventh century has been much exaggerated on both sides of the Muslim-Christian divide. Far from forcing subjects to adopt their faith (which at that point was no more than embryonic), they discouraged conversion if only because it would have undermined the poll tax on Jews and Christians on which their revenue depended. But the religious zeal of Catholic armies that have periodically erupted out of Western Europe

Daniel Lazare, a frequent contributor to the Books and the Arts section, is writing a book on Judaism, Christianity and Islam for Pantheon.

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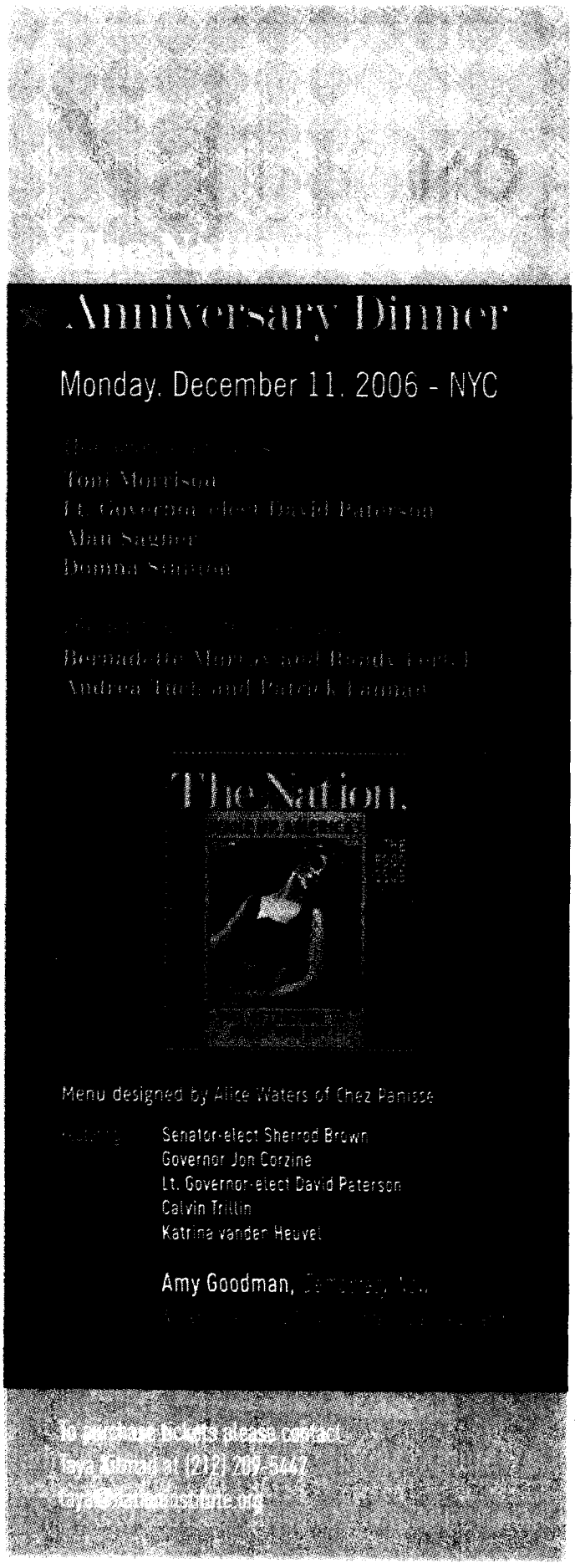
has not been exaggerated. Beginning with Charlemagne, who is said to have beheaded 4,500 Saxons for the crime of lapsing into paganism, they repeatedly engaged in conversion by the sword along with mass murder of all those who refused. If forced conversion is "contrary to God's nature," as the Pope asserted at Regensburg, then no institution has behaved in a more ungodly fashion than his own church.

On the other hand, considering that Exodus 15:3 plainly states that "Yahweh is a warrior" and that slaughtering unbelievers is one of the things that warrior-god worshipers do, perhaps no institution has behaved in a more godly fashion either. Were it not for the fact that he has been working on it since at least 1998, Christopher Tyerman's massive new history of the Crusades could be read as a rejoinder to the Benedictine doctrine that forced conversion is something the other side practices, never our own. Rather than beginning with Charlemagne, *God's War* opens a couple of centuries later, when, following an extended period of punishment at the hands of Viking, Magyar and Saracen raiders, the Catholic West turned the tables on its tormenters and began striking back with startling vigor. In 1015–16, Pisan and Genoese raiders were attacking Arab pirate bases in Sardinia. A few decades after that, Christian rulers in the north of Spain were hitting back at Muslim rulers to the south. By 1060 Norman adventurers were campaigning to take Sicily from the Arabs, who had taken it two centuries earlier from the Byzantines. Then, in 1095, came the climax, an immense human tide that poured out of France, Flanders and other provinces and began making its way east with the purpose of liberating, so to speak, the Holy Land from the Seljuk Turks.

This was the opening salvo in the Crusades, a century and a quarter of invasions and assaults not only against Palestine but Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and even Constantinople, the Byzantine capital that was the Latin West's supposed ally. Tyerman does not limit his account to those expeditions, however, but also throws in the Albigensian crusade of 1209–29 against a heretical group of "dualists" in the South of France known as the Cathars; the campaigns by Teutonic Knights against pagan tribes in the eastern Baltic; and the Christian reconquest of Spain, which was largely complete with the fall of Seville in 1248 even though a Muslim outpost in Granada managed to hold on until 1492.

All were of a piece, which is to say that all flowed from a Western resurgence that had its first stirrings in the tenth century and had reached high gear by the late eleventh. Two things about this resurgence stand out. One is its multidimensionality. Weak, depopulated and culturally impoverished, Western Europe was on everyone's list as the most unlikely candidate for resurgence. Yet it was soon racing ahead not just militarily but religiously, politically, economically and even intellectually. The Parisian student of dialectics was one aspect of the Western European takeoff, the powerful growth of shipping and trade was another, while the crusading knight and the fiery cleric proclaiming, "Kill them. The Lord knows who are his own"—as the Abbot Arnaud Aimery reportedly did in urging on the indiscriminate slaughter of the people of Béziers, a Cathari stronghold—were a third. All were products of an increasingly aggressive and energetic society bent on strengthening politico-religious authority at home and extending its reach abroad.

The other thing that stands out about this small-r renaissance is its roughness and brutality. The elegant Byzantine court was appalled by the barbaric hordes that landed on its doorstep at the tail end of the eleventh century. Anna Comnena, daughter of Emperor Alexius I, was contemptuous of Norman soldiers who "ravaged the outskirts of Nicaea"—located across the Sea of Marmara from Constantinople—"acting with horrible cruelty to the whole population." Not only were these Catholic



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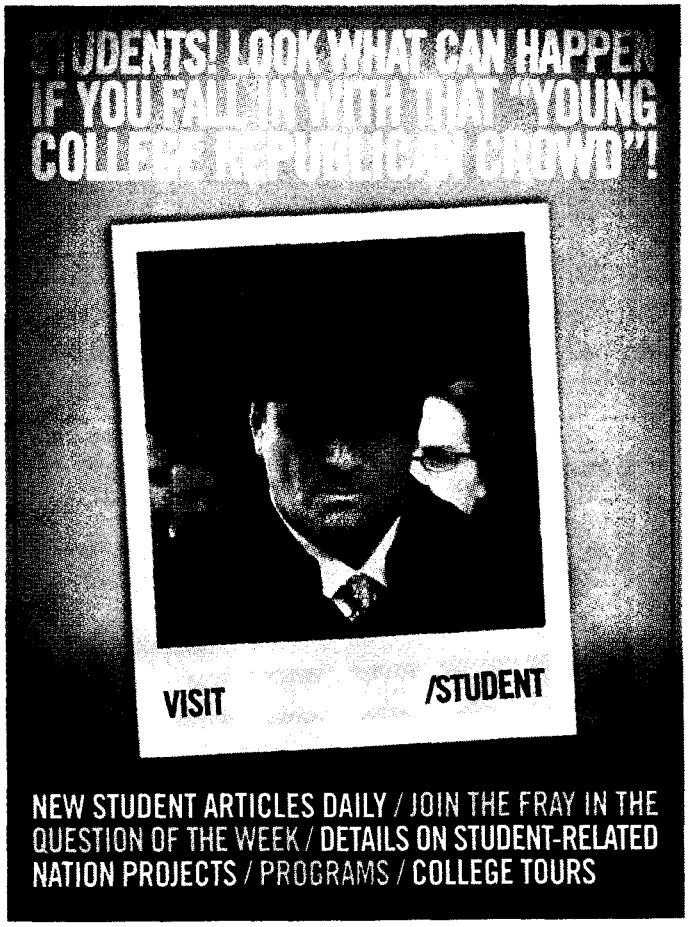
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brutes greedy, arrogant and hotheaded, she wrote, but even their battlefield skills were overrated. They were "indomitable in the opening cavalry charge," but "afterwards, because of the weight of their armor and their own passionate nature and recklessness, it is actually very easy to beat them."

Still, barbaric enthusiasm carried the Crusaders a long way. Although (or perhaps because) they were headstrong and impulsive, their military exploits, at the outset at least, were little short of astounding. Traveling some 2,000 miles from their home base, they quickly adapted to the unfamiliar terrain and novel tactics they encountered on crossing into Seljuk territory. They mastered the fighting march and learned to counter the rapid attack, feint and ambush that were standard in the Middle East. Anna Comnena was right about at least one thing, moreover: Provided he kept his seat, the Western mounted knight was well-nigh invincible. He was the armored tank of the day, "maneuverable [and] impervious to most of the fire power available to the opposing infantry," as Tyerman puts it. "Mounted on increasingly well-bred, specially trained and larger horses, protected by armor and wielding heavy lances, maces and swords, a few knights could hold their own against scores of infantry. The repeated accounts of seemingly miraculous victories or escapes by hopelessly outnumbered bands of knights, while likely to be exaggerated, preserved a truth."

Staggering from the heat and thirst, the chevaliers and their followers fought their way across Anatolia and then somehow marshaled the resources to mount an eight-month siege of the city of Antioch in what is now southern Turkey. Buoyed by the supposed discovery of the Holy Lance that had pierced Christ's side—in reality a piece of metal dug up from beneath the floor of an Antiochene cathedral—the exhausted Crusaders then turned around and defeated a far larger Turkish force sent to relieve the city in June 1098. They celebrated their triumph in good Christian fashion by slaughtering every Muslim male within reach and driving lances into the bellies of the women as well.

But Antioch was merely a warm-up. Making their way down the coast of present-day Syria, Lebanon and Israel, the Crusaders turned inland at the town of Arsuf, a few miles north of Jaffa, and headed for Jerusalem. After setting up camp, they proclaimed a three-day fast and, led by a priest, marched barefoot around the city in imitation of Joshua at the battle of Jericho. Once the fighting began on June 13, 1099, they used mobile siege towers constructed by Genoese engineers to edge closer and closer to the city walls. After a month of dodging arrows and bolts, they finally got near enough to throw down planks and leap across. Swarming down the ramparts, they overwhelmed the city's Jewish and Muslim defenders. "The scale of the slaughter," writes Tyerman, "impressed even hardened veterans of the campaign, who recalled the area [around the Temple Mount] 'streaming with blood' that reached to the killers' ankles." Jews who fled into a synagogue were set ablaze, while "Muslims were indiscriminately cut to pieces, decapitated or slowly tortured by fire." A few days later, the Crusaders ordered Muslim survivors to remove the dead bodies clogging the narrow streets and carry them outside to be burned. When the Muslims had done as they were told, the Christians massacred them as well. On July 15, 1099, the victors gathered in a local church to give thanks for their triumph. "With the fall of the city," one participant noted, "it was rewarding to see the worship of the pilgrims at the Holy Sepulcher, the clapping of hands, the rejoicing and singing of a new song to the Lord. Their souls offered to the victorious and triumphant God prayers of praise which they could not express in words."

Turning the other cheek this was not. But, contrary to a

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long tradition of romanticizing the Other, Tyerman argues that the slaughter in Jerusalem was consistent with the prevailing regional standard. "The recent Turkish conquests in the Near East had been accompanied by carnage and enslavement on a grand scale," he observes. "When it suited, Muslim victors could behave as bestially as any Christian." A Jewish observer noted that, unlike Muslims, Christians at least did not rape enemy women before killing them. On the other hand, there was nothing in the Islamic camp that quite compared with what *God's War* describes as "a daredevil but starving group" of Christian warriors known as the Tafurs, who not only killed their Muslim opponents but reportedly ate them, too.

One side engaged in mass rape, while the other preferred a dash of cannibalism to liven things up. Despite wading through blood, both others' and their own, the Crusaders were able to maintain a grip on Jerusalem a scant eighty-eight years before being dislodged by a Kurdish warlord named Saladin (who, according to Tyerman, does not quite merit the accolades heaped upon him by Western xenophiles). Decades of economic decline followed in the Crusaders' remaining territories up and down the coast. With it came deepening disorder marked by, among other things, a vicious civil war that erupted in 1256 between Venetians, Pisans, Provençals, Templars and Teutonic Knights on one side and Genoese, Hospitallers and Catalans on the other. Peace was mostly restored in 1258, but then Crusader possessions began toppling under growing Muslim pressure—Jaffa in 1268, followed by Tripoli in 1289 and then, in one fell swoop, Acre, Tyre, Sidon, Beirut, Tortosa and Athlit in 1291. Western knights continued to gain ground in Spain and Portugal. They created a short-lived Latin republic in Constantinople in 1204, while participating a century later in lavish campaigns against Prussian, Livonian and Lithuanian pagans complete, according to Tyerman, with "special feasts, displays of heraldry, souvenirs and even prizes." Yet in the eastern Mediterranean, they clearly overshot themselves, traveling too far to wrest too little from an enemy that ultimately proved too strong.

What did it all add up to? Not much, according to Francis Bacon, who jeered at the Crusades as a "rendezvous of cracked brains that wore their feather in their head instead of their hat." David Hume agreed, calling the campaign to take back the Holy Land "the most signal and most durable monument of human folly that has yet appeared in any age or nation." Despite efforts by economic determinists to describe the Crusades as a trade war in religious guise, the French medievalist Jacques Le Goff once wisecracked that the sole economic benefit to derive from them was the introduction of the apricot. In fact, according to Tyerman, Westerners did not need the Crusades to insinuate themselves into the economic life of the eastern Mediterranean; the region, he writes, was "crawling" with Western pilgrims, mercenaries, merchants and pirates before they even began. There is simply no evidence that the Western economic position was any stronger than it would otherwise have been.

So what is the explanation? The Crusades should be understood not as a clash between two systems but as the product of a Christian-Islamic system from the Atlantic to the Persian Gulf that was by turns competitive and symbiotic. The two halves of this system thrusted and parried, advanced and withdrew, but also borrowed from each other, traded and stole. *Inter alia*, they used the extended warfare between them to reorganize themselves politically. Both underwent a process of convergence as those at the top tightened the controls and marshaled social resources. European society grew increasingly uniform from one end of the continent to the other with the result, according to Fernand Braudel,

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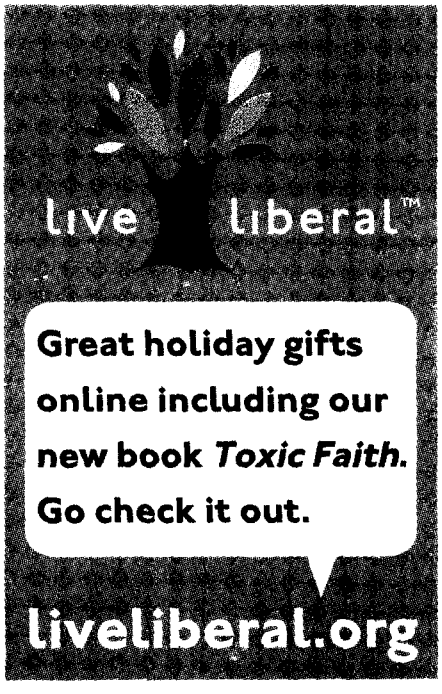

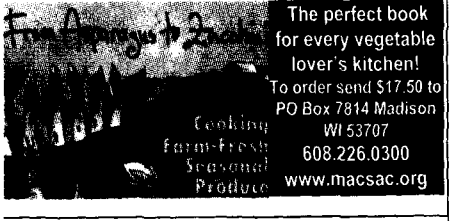
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that a traveler would feel "as much at home in Lübeck as in Paris, in London as in Bruges, in Cologne as in Burgos, Milan, or Venice. Moral, religious and cultural values, and the rules of war, love, life and death were the same everywhere, from one tier to another, whatever their quarrels, their revolts or their conflicts." Similarly, growing Turkish hegemony in the Middle East led to the imposition of a Sunni orthodoxy that was just as uniform. In the West, the popes had tried to solve the problem of endemic warfare among the nobility by "externalizing" it onto the Muslims. In the East, Islamic rulers also had to put a stop to endemic infighting before dealing with Turkish freebooters known as the Khwarazmians, and they checked the Mongols at the Battle of Homs in 1281 before finishing off the remaining Crusaders. By the fourteenth century, they were ready to turn the table on the Christians and begin marching up the Balkans under Ottoman leadership.

God's War is a long but highly readable account of this extensive back-and-forth struggle. It is an impressive achievement, a work that manages to tie together an extraordinary number of threads across nearly half a millennium of European history. Although it can be taken as a response to Pope Benedict XVI's comments at Regensburg, it is more properly read as an extended rejoinder to Steven Runciman's classic three-volume *History of the Crusades*, published in the early 1950s, a long and colorful account that is nonetheless studded with judgments that now seem prejudiced and amateurish. Tyerman, by contrast, is never amateurish. His knowledge of the period is encyclopedic, and his judgments are sharp, astute and fair—which is to say unsparing—to both camps. He neither vilifies Islam nor engages in the easy Euro-bashing that is the obverse of Islamophobia. With so many people succumbing to subjectivism these days, it is bracing to come across a historian who remains resolutely above the fray, who insists on viewing the conflict as a whole and who always has the broader context in mind.

Not that *God's War* is entirely free of faults. The writing is clear, although on one or two occasions it gets bogged down in details. More significant is the near absence of anything by way of a social or economic dimension. Tyerman tells us little about what it was about Western Europe that enabled it to project so much force at so great a distance. The Third Crusade, launched in 1189, for instance, was heavily dependent on sea transport, and although Tyerman informs us that "the variety of vessels available, the certainty of planning and routes, the awareness of naval logistics, the distances covered and the accurate predictions of timing reflected the exponential growth in maritime activity and exchange around the coasts of Europe in the twelfth century," he doesn't say where this exponential growth came from or what socioeconomic innovations allowed it to occur. He is silent about the uniquely European blend of fragmentation and cohesion that led to endless political infighting but also to the formation of highly effective fighting orders such as the Templars and Hospitallers. Thanks to an emerging body of corporate law that granted a high degree of autonomy and self-governance to such groups, Europe was able to create new sources of economic and political power that other societies over the long haul could not match.

The same goes for economic productivity, the ultimate reason for all those bigger knights, bigger horses and weightier armor—Tyerman tells us nothing about that either. His discussion of the evolution of the Christian doctrine of holy war similarly stops short. The problem, admittedly, is a difficult one. Despite the pacific tone of the Gospels, the Christian society that emerged in the Latin West, as historian William McNeill once noted, was the most heavily militarized on earth, with the possible exception of shogun Japan. Indeed, *God's War* recounts the tale of the abbot of St. Germain during the Viking siege of Paris in 885–86 who, rather than loving his enemies, was said to be "capable of piercing seven men with a single arrow [and] in jest he commanded some of them to be taken to the kitchen." Tyerman trots out the usual suspects in explaining where this sort of Christian bloodlust came from—not only the compromises that church fathers made with state power following the conversion of Constantine in the early fourth century but also the sacred texts that seem to urge more and more, such as the Book of Revelation, with its vision of a world drowning in blood, and the Old Testament tales of murder and mayhem that make the Koran seem positively Gandhian. He is quite correct in all this, although he might have pointed out that Christ had his militant side as well, one he revealed when denouncing the rich, or proclaiming that he had "not come to bring peace but a sword" or, in an especially curious incident outside Jerusalem, blasting a fig tree merely because he was hungry and it was bare of fruit.

But even if Christ hadn't caused that fig tree to wither, it wouldn't have mattered. Even at its purest, Christian pacifism reflects a kind of inward-directed violence that can all too easily be turned in the op-

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posite direction. Given Christ's command that "if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off," what is a good Christian to do with a sinner causing an entire community to go astray? Excommunicate him or burn him at the stake? Even more fundamental is the issue of revelation itself. Revelation in the Western monotheistic tradition is a form of divine intervention in which the supreme being makes himself known to ordinary mortals. Because such visitations are miraculous and hence outside the realm of nature, they can't be proven according to the normal rules of evidence. Instead, they must be taken on faith. What's more, because they constitute the greatest events in history, belief in them becomes the greatest of virtues while disbelief becomes the basest of sins. For that reason, the people in the next valley who believe in a different revelation can't simply be ignored or laughed off—they must be ruthlessly suppressed, if not exterminated. Revelation, no matter how benign, thus becomes the basis for ceaseless warfare.

This was the ideology at the heart of the Crusades. Reason and evidence are forces for convergence since they lead to conclusions on which most thoughtful people can agree—that the earth is round, for instance, that it circles the sun, that $E=mc^2$ and so on. Faith, by contrast, is a force for divergence—or, more precisely, a force for convergence and divergence, as entire societies are forced to believe in one "truth" and then to launch a holy war against those believing in another that is equally unverifiable. In his talk at Regensburg, Pope Benedict XVI complained about "reason which is deaf to the divine." *God's War* is about what happens when people are all too alert to voices that no one else can hear and are all too determined to carry out what they believe to be those voices' instructions. The results were appalling during the Crusades. It is even more appalling that the same habits are now making a comeback. ■

A Life of His Own

BRENDA WINEAPPLE

LEONARD WOOLF: A Biography. By Victoria Glendinning. Free Press. 498 pp. $30.

In 1935 Leonard Woolf, a 55-year-old British Jew, drove through Germany to see Nazis for himself while accompanied by his brilliant, beautiful but frequently ill wife and a pet marmoset named Mitzy that liked to perch on his shoulder: Such was the willful, endearing defiance of a remarkable public intellectual who today is best known as Virginia Woolf's husband.

Advertised as the "first-ever" life of Leonard Woolf—itself an astonishing fact—Victoria Glendinning's splendid new book, *Leonard Woolf: A Biography*, quietly deplores the treatment ("pseudo-scholarly speculation based on partial knowledge") Woolf typically receives at the hands of mechanical feminists or academics who, worshiping Virginia, glibly label her husband an enabler of her genius or, even more glibly, brand him as its persecutor. Glendinning, the accomplished author of biographies of such women as Vita Sackville-West, Edith Sitwell and Elizabeth Bowen (as well as of three novels), intends to resurrect Leonard Woolf less as the wife of a genius (to borrow Gertrude Stein's tag for Alice Toklas) than as a thoughtful skeptic, fierce competitor and campaigner for human rights, women's rights, disarmament and international peace. As Glendinning reminds us, Woolf helped launch Britain's Labour Party, became its adviser and in 1931 was a member of a Labour delegation that met with Gandhi. He also ran (unsuccessfully) for Parliament on a socialist platform and directed, with his adored wife, the small press that published both T.S. Eliot and Sigmund Freud.

By keeping her eye firmly fixed on Leonard, Glendinning skillfully guides her reader through the Scylla of Virginia Woolf and the Charybdis of the incestuous Bloomsbury group of artists and intellectuals whose various pairings and points of view have themselves become a cottage industry. Leonard Woolf was cut from a different social cloth, and though he was the son of a prosperous lawyer, he did not grow up in the smart part of Kensington, near Knightsbridge, where Leslie Stephen, the founding editor of the *Dictionary of National*

Brenda Wineapple, author, most recently, of Hawthorne: A Life, *is writing a book on Emily Dickinson (both from Knopf).*

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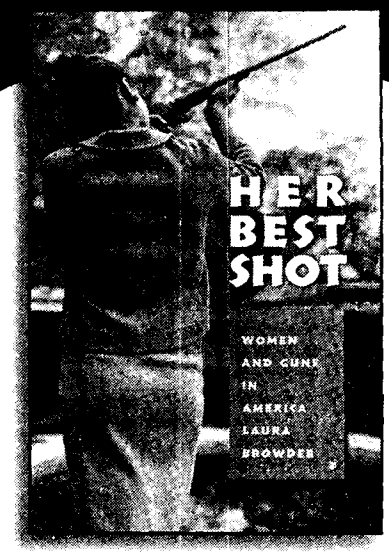

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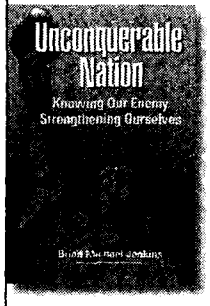

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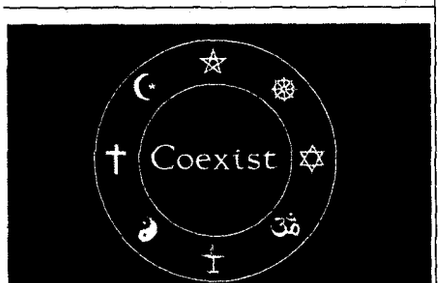

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Biography, lived with the daughters of his second marriage, Vanessa and Virginia. Born in 1880 into Britain's Jewish middle class, Woolf put up with the accepted anti-Semitism of polite society and cloaked his sensitivities with what he called his "carapace," denying to himself that the lifelong need for such a shell, as Glendinning observes, may have had everything to do with his being Jewish.

As a boy, Woolf suffered from a congenital tremor in his hands, from the early death of his father, from a mother addicted to respectability and from bouts of depression that led to another defensive posture: his skeptical mantra, "Nothing matters." But this tough-boy existentialism also portends Woolf's deeper recognition that, as he said in later life, "nothing matters, and everything matters." A morally courageous man committed to reason, tolerance and social justice, Woolf devoted himself to ameliorating the problems of the world. In this, Glendinning sees the Dreyfus case as a watershed not only for Europe but for Woolf: It "jump-started in twentieth-century European politics the role of the public intellectual, and the philosophical stance of (in the French sense) engagement, which became central in the 1930s, and with which Leonard Woolf was to align himself."

But above all, Woolf wanted to be a writer. He devoured Henry James and Ibsen, Tolstoy and Flaubert, particularly at Trinity College, Cambridge, which he entered in 1899. There he immediately met three other undergraduates, Lytton Strachey, Clive Bell and Thoby Stephen, each "inexhaustibly interested in themselves and each other," as Glendinning wryly notes. (They called Woolf the Rabbi.) Stephen's sister Vanessa would marry Bell, Virginia would marry Woolf and together they formed the nub of the Bloomsbury group along with several members of the holiest of Cambridge societies, the secret Apostles. Woolf was a member, as were Strachey and Bertrand Russell, John Maynard Keynes, critic Desmond MacCarthy and novelist E.M. Forster, all of them largely influenced by G.E. Moore's *Principia Ethica* (1903), with its affirmation of human consciousness, or "human intercourse and the enjoyment of beautiful objects," as the basis of a life worth living.

Family finances put a crimp in the good life: Since his mother and siblings (nine in all) were dependent on the eldest sons, Woolf accepted a position as a colonial administrator in Ceylon (renamed Sri Lanka in 1972). He packed seventy volumes of Voltaire in a crate, bore the White Man's Burden, acquired the Tamil and Sinhalese languages, studied Buddhism, oversaw floggings and superintended the Pearl Fishery off the coast of the Gulf of Mannar. At first he seemed to himself an "unconscious imperialist," then "politically schizophrenic, an anti-imperialist who enjoyed the fleshpots of imperialism." Glendinning, who felicitously evaluates all of Woolf's writing, regards his story "Pearls and Swine," composed about ten years after he returned to England, as a Conradian exploration into the heart of appalling imperial darkness.

Wavering in his allegiance to the colonial bureaucracy, Woolf, at the prodding of Strachey, fell unconditionally in love with Virginia Stephen during a furlough home and quit the civil service for good in 1912. The couple, an unlikely pair, married in the summer of that year. Mentally unstable, Virginia had already suffered two breakdowns; she was frighteningly sharp, terribly fragile, vain, self-critical, mischievous, hugely talented and anti-Semitic; and though she was not physically attracted to Leonard, as she told him point-blank, she loved him. "Their marriage was consummated," writes Glendinning, "not infrequently, but incompletely." Wisely, she lets the matter more or less drop—there's enough speculation about the Woolfs in the bedroom, she remarks with just a touch of aspersion—and yet she just as wisely admits "it is legitimate to wonder how he accommodated his strong sexuality."

There may have been infidelities on the part of Leonard, to be sure, but no one quite knows, particularly since his devotion to his wife was such that he would do nothing to upset her, and presumably he took responsibility for their painful decision not to have children, a decision Glendinning calls courageous. For a deep-dyed skeptic, he was a mighty romantic. As for Virginia's affair with Vita Sackville-West, Leonard turned a blind eye. Not until he read her letters in his last years did he fully confront that relationship and, during an editorial meeting at *The New Statesman*, suddenly blurt out, "My wife was a lesbian."

Tactfully handling the Woolf marriage as well as the delicate matter of Virginia's health, Glendinning just as deftly treats the development of Virginia Woolf's literary career, never letting it or her marvelous writing diminish Leonard, his intelligence or the friends and family Virginia considered tedious. His career as a novelist is another matter. In 1913 Virginia and Leonard both completed their first novels: Hers was *The Voyage Out*, his *The Village in the Jungle* (never out of print in Sri Lanka), a remarkable book in the tradition of novels about the empire that Glendinning considers superior to works in the same genre by Kipling,

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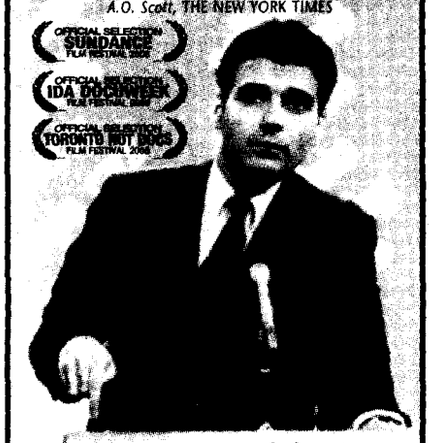
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Forster and Orwell. But after the couple jointly published *Two Stories*, one tale by each Woolf, on their newly acquired printing press, Lytton Strachey wrote praising Virginia's story as a work of genius, without saying a word about Leonard's. Leonard then lost his appetite for writing fiction and turned to the world of politics. He edited the *International Review*, co-edited the *Political Quarterly*, assumed the literary editorship of Britain's *The Nation* and *Athenaeum*, and published such acclaimed books as *International Government* (1916), *Empire and Commerce in Africa* (1920) and *Quack, Quack* (1935), a denunciation of Hitler and Mussolini published the month after he and Virginia returned from their terrifying journey through Nazi Germany.

In Glendinning's sympathetic telling, Woolf's story is also a fable of the undone: the posts he did not hold, the books he did not write, particularly, in the latter case, a cultural history of, or a novel about, the Wandering Jew, which Glendinning notes would have been the perfect subject for him: "It might have been his masterpiece," she comments matter-of-factly. Invited to run for Parliament again, he declined, and despite his work for Beatrice and Sidney Webb, he did not pursue a connection with the London School of Economics, which they had founded; he also turned down most every honor offered him. Largely, he tailored his movement and his ambitions to the health of his wife, whom he could not leave alone for long. At the same time, his self-limitation had deep roots, as Glendinning aptly reminds us, in the feelings of inferiority, gloom and anger he feared in himself long before he met Virginia.

After her suicide in 1941, which Glendinning devastatingly recounts, Leonard fell back on his unfailing rationality, which at once reinforced his despair ("she is dead and utterly destroyed," he heartbreakingly said) and provided a strange balm: After his wife's cremation, he had his hair cut. Isolated, he took to his beloved garden—those irises, as he'd told Virginia, that would bloom long after Hitler had gone—and in the remaining twenty-eight years of his life, touchingly re-created by Glendinning in her book's absorbing last chapters, he fell in love with the artist Marjorie "Trekkie" Parsons, a married woman with whom he evidently carried on another chaste relationship. At the same time, he preserved and published his wife's diaries, responded to the cadres of researchers clamoring for information about her, kept up his journalism, condemned the Vietnam War, spoke out against violence, carried trays of fruit to the village school,

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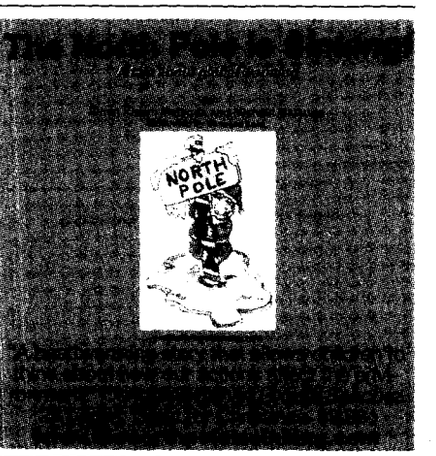

Age Shock
How Finance is Failing Us
By Robin Blackburn Verso Books, 2006
Author will be at
The New School December 11
See event listing page 52

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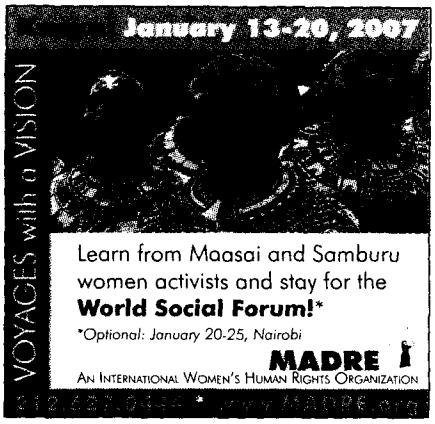
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EVENTS

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Conference on Punishment

■ "The US Record," a Social Research conference at The New School on who, what, why and how we punish. Thursday, November 30, and Friday, December 1, 66 West 12th Street, NYC. Join us as we examine the foundations of our ideas of punishment, explore the social effects of current practices and search for viable alternatives to our carceral state. Special event: Richard Gere and Carey Lowell. For information and to register: www.socres.org/punishment.

Retirement in Crisis

■ The Schwartz Center for Economic Policy Analysis presents "Americans Face Rising Economic Insecurity: What Can Be Done?" A special symposium on the crisis in the US pensions system. Jacob Hacker, author of *The Great Risk Shift: The Assault on American Jobs, Families, Health Care, and Retirement—And How You Can Fight Back*; Robin Blackburn, author of *Age Shock: How Finance is Failing Us*; and Teresa Ghilarducci, author of *The End of Retirement* (forthcoming); with Bob Kerrey. Free. December 11, 7 PM. The New School, 65 Fifth Ave. RSVP to cepa@newschool.edu or (212) 229-5901 x4911.

The advertising deadline for Events is every Thursday. Rates: $200 for 50 words; $250 for 75 words, additional words (above 75) $2.00 each. To place an ad, call Leigh at (212) 209-5414.

grew prizewinning vegetables and composed a quintet of his own autobiographies. These are minor masterpieces: direct, honest, decent, breathtakingly modest. "I see clearly that I achieved practically nothing," he wrote at the age of 89 in 1969. The world today "would be exactly the same if I had played ping-pong instead of sitting on committees and writing books and memoranda." There is truth in what he says: Nothing matters. Then again, he was also right: Everything matters, especially him. ■

EXCHANGE
CONTINUED

(Continued From Page 2)

that black and white are merely constructs, but he does so within the context of a narrative that constantly insists that its mixed-race protagonist has been living inauthentically by playing white classical music and trying to integrate himself into white society. The novel's emotional climax, as opposed to its rhetorical one, involves that protagonist's return to his black roots through an embrace of cultural separatism.

Penny Mattern's assertion that Powers is a great writer because he writes great books is argument by tautology, and returns us to the fact that about novels and novelists reasonable minds will disagree. The job of the critic, it has been said, is not to have correct opinions but to have interesting ones. But Mattern doesn't see it that way. If I differ with her, my understanding must be deficient and my voice suppressed. It's a sentiment that's implicit in all these letters, but expressed most peevishly by Ernest Lowe. Lowe's complaint seems to boil down to the fact that someone, somewhere disagrees with him. It's not enough that virtually every other book critic in the country shares his opinion. Let one person affront his lordly sensibilities by failing to weep when he weeps, glow when he glows, and he must dash off a 500-word denunciation impugning that person's intelligence, judgment and character. And so the usual accusations are trotted out: The critic is jealous of the writer's talent; the critic is resentful of the writer's success; the critic is impelled by deep-seated personal problems; the critic is a creepy little academic who gets his kicks attacking people. Everything but the possibility that the critic is also a thoughtful and sensitive reader, one who reaches his opinions as honestly as anyone else and who cares enough about literature to express those opinions even when they expose him to abuse. Lowe fails to cite any of the many laudatory reviews I've written over the years, even though he must have come across them in his opposition research. So who's the attacker here? If he doesn't want to read anything negative about the books he likes, he should read press releases, not book reviews. And if he doesn't want to read anything that challenges his opinions, he should stop reading altogether.

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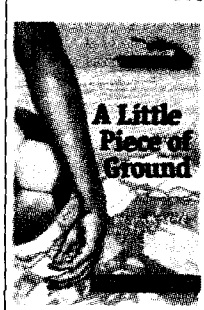

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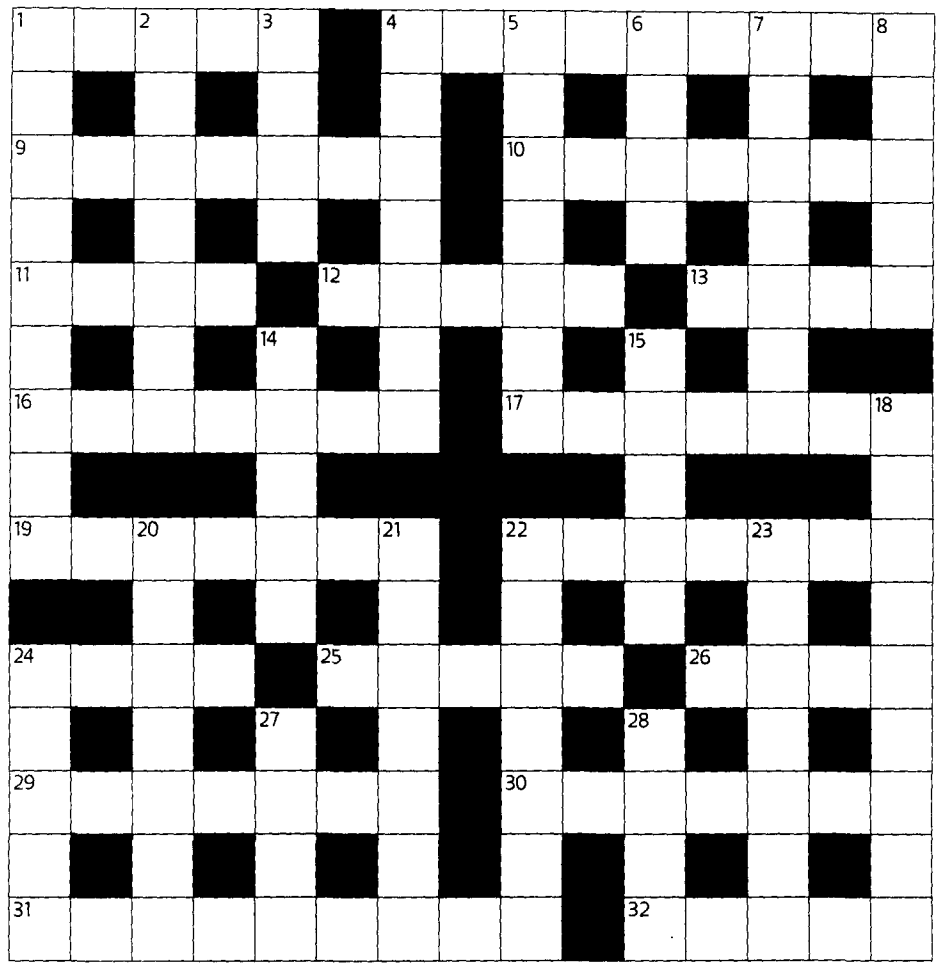

ACROSS

1 and **4** Tell the person who aimed at the first part, "Throw away fish—just get dessert!" (5,9)

9 North Carolinian provides sticky stuff to the lowdown type. (7)

10 Rainstorm—something that goes around an oriental type in Kenya... (7)

11 and **12** ...with what comes down in the storm, or rips and tears the possible result. (9)

13 What the bride has to say at 50, with what some people worship, but not working, as one hears. (4)

16 The sort of pot with one little flower is the best! (7)

17 Certain types keep the little horse inside—things from which something takes its name. (7)

19 Those who put two and two together, at times? (7)

22 I get it put in more upstanding form, as a counter. (7)

24 and **25** One from a foreign country safe in the athletic contest. (4,5)

26 and **24** down Direction to do something supposedly rude in New York. (4,5)

29 Briefly, where to find a fielder, possibly. (2,5)

30 The sort of hint got from something with no substance. (7)

31 Sort of dines inside, a false step being an outside result, when it's neither hot nor cold. (9)

32 A fishy sort of 14? (5)

DOWN

1 Places where people may put something in the pot, or just entrance halls? (9)

2 Keep plugging—stripes may be all you get out of it. (7)

3 The First Lady has a point—just! (4)

4 What one may bang, about ancient enough to be a low point of activity. (7)

5 The masculine type is about to have a little drink with part of the Roman Legion. (7)

6 Regarded as the seat of power of a wild lion? (4)

7 The time to see mad dogs and Englishmen getting a tan. (7)

8 Quiet, yet? (5)

14 The color of 32, possibly. (5)

15 and **27** How to cut logs of old pyrites. (5,4)

18 Layers with something precious as a ploy? (9)

20 Something to clean the floor has silk components, but is the ineffectual type. (7)

21 Land around a place in Washington? (7)

22 Things that show the capability of making money—the old way. (7)

23 What the counter does in a consecutive way. (7)

24 See 26

27 See 15

28 Is it sort of crazy coming up with what Caesar complained about to Brutus? (4)

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3059

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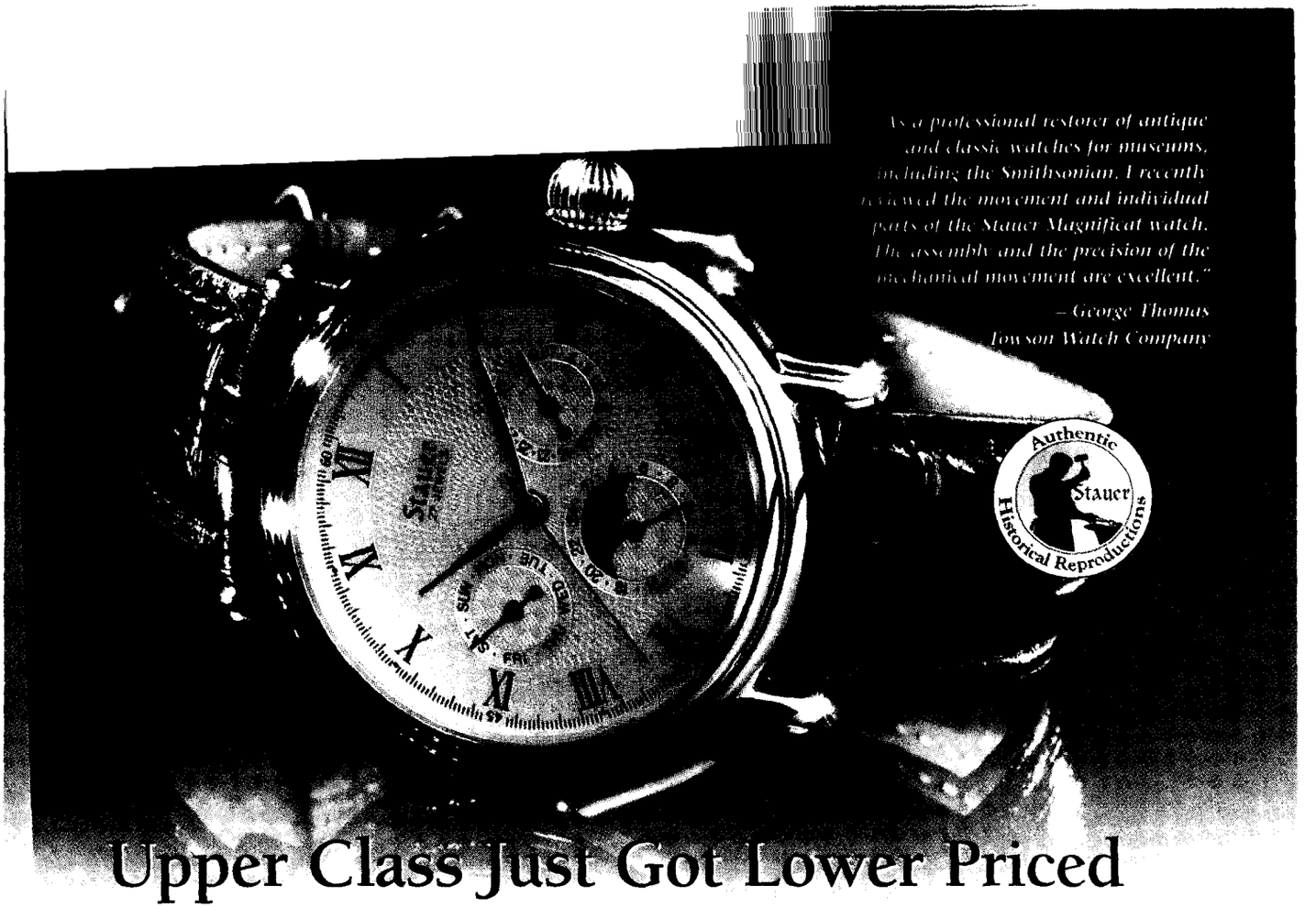
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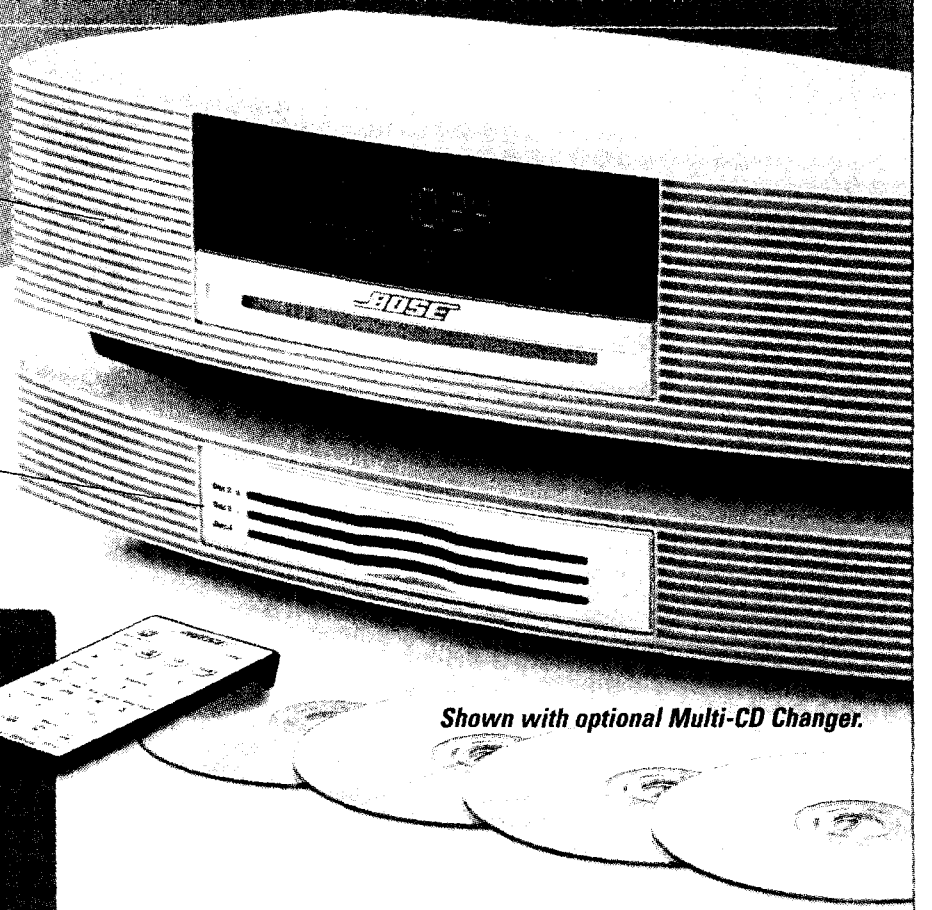

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